

***‘Discover the joyful
nature of life’***

THE HAPPINESS HANDBOOK

***Practical Exercises and Techniques to Develop
Harmony in All Areas of Your Life***

Ruth Clydesdale

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Introduction

There are moments in life when everything changes. Reading a simple phrase did it for me: 'Be happy now!' What surprised me was that although the trenchant advice sounded so contemporary, the writer was a magician and philosopher who lived in the 15th century. But how on earth could I go about following such a recommendation? That's what I wanted to discover, so I set out on a quest – and I found a method of wisdom teaching that had been lost for centuries. Using this knowledge transformed my life. I hope that by reading on, you too will learn to be happy, now and always.

Who was the magician who knew the secret of happiness? His name was Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), and he lived in Florence during the most exciting years of the Renaissance. A small, kindly and unassuming man, he was one of the most remarkable people in Western history. His range of knowledge was extraordinary: he was a priest, philosopher, doctor, astrologer, musician and magus. Hardly surprising, then, that he was one of the most influential figures of the Italian Renaissance. Not only was he respected right across Europe for his recovery of ancient Greek wisdom teaching and his inspired realization that it can be reconciled with Christianity, but he was also deeply loved by a wide circle of devoted friends.

Ficino dispensed wisdom tempered by wit and, despite his great learning and influence, remained modest and accessible to all. He was a doctor to his friends, composed healing music for them, and performed magical rituals and exorcisms. His profound knowledge of Greek philosophy was unrivalled, and from it he drew the practical advice that he dispensed when asked. But Ficino was anything but a dry academic. He learnt his wisdom in the most direct way of all: by applying it to his own experience of life.

The magic of Ficino is that he recognized that life isn't perfect – not even for the rich, the beautiful or the powerful. That doesn't mean that he gave up the search for happiness: far from it. Ficino worked all the harder to find a stable and reliable source of joy

and fulfilment. What's more, he succeeded, and along the way he discovered methods of improving all areas of life – relationships, health and work among them. Ficino's advice sometimes draws on common sense and sometimes on magic and astrology. Much of it displays an understanding of how we tick: of psychology.

Ficino's advice is particularly interesting to us in the 21st century because it is holistic. He tells us how to stay physically healthy and how to nourish ourselves emotionally. He also gives advice on finding the most satisfying way to earn a living, and on drawing love into our lives – and, for those who want it, he offers wisdom relating to the soul and our spiritual existence.

All this advice hangs together because it is founded on a single principle: that of harmony. Ficino lived at a time when the universe was seen as sacred, a divine creation. The harmonic force of love holds everything together; the cosmos is like a great piece of music, the planets singing as they move; and every person is a tiny universe, a microcosm of the macrocosm. Medicine in Ficino's day aimed at harmonizing the forces of the body, and Ficino's therapies do the same for the emotions and the soul. His purpose is to bring us into harmony with the cosmos, so that our lives run smoothly and beautifully, without jarring discord.

However, we're living in the material world, far from the spiritual perfection of heaven, so some discord is to be expected. Ficino's advice helps us to deal with this by keeping it in proportion. This is what philosophy meant to him, which is something very different from what it is today. Philosophy in fact means 'love of wisdom', and for Ficino and his friends it signified finding a way to live that worked on all levels. It's a path that encompasses both practical issues and spiritual questions, and that is what we look at in this book.

Ficino was drawing on ancient, mystical knowledge, and his wisdom is timeless. These days we might not be in a position to follow some of his more arcane advice, such as making pills of crushed jewels rolled in gold leaf, but a large number of Ficino's recommendations for living well and happily are very relevant to us. Taken together, they add up to a complete set of instructions for life, from caring for the body to developing a rich spiritual existence.

We do, however, have to understand some Renaissance ideas about our bodies, souls and the cosmos in order to make the most of this ancient wisdom. These will be explained as we go along, and they can be taken symbolically rather than as representing objective reality. We will learn to look at the world through symbols, and the advantage of this (apart from its being fun!) is that even the most boring, mundane thing or action is imbued with significance. We will see the universe as alive – every single part of it – and ourselves as being essential parts of an awesomely vast whole.

Ficino never systematized his wisdom, but that's what I've done in this book, which brings together all the insights he set out in letters to friends, books on health and magical manuals. Once I'd gathered this material together, I realized that it fell naturally into a graduated system. We begin by looking at our physical and emotional needs, then progress through increasingly refined levels of existence until we finish with the soul. Thus the early chapters contain advice that's largely common sense, although expressed in more colourful terms than you may be used to. Then we move into more mysterious realms of magic and astrology before leaving those too behind and entering into the world of spirit and soul. By the time you reach that stage, you will effectively have been initiated into a timeless wisdom teaching.

Each chapter contains exercises for you to do and advice that you can apply to your life, but our exploration of Ficino's wisdom builds up into a system that you'll only see properly if you read the whole book. We approach the secret of true happiness slowly and in stages – and once we get there, it illuminates everything. However, your journey is an individual one. So, while every chapter is important – for every area of life needs some attention – it's left up to you, the reader, to decide where your most pressing individual needs lie. We're all different, and everyone will focus on some particular part or parts of this ancient advice. The wonderful thing you'll discover is that Ficino's advice works. Try it and you will see. The result is happiness – right here, right now!

1 *Happy Mind, Happy Body*

Let's begin at the beginning, with some practical tips on making life comfortable for ourselves. Once you've learned how to create and maintain a firm foundation of physical contentment, then you will be in a good position to start looking at how to increase your happiness in other ways.

Holistic health

In this chapter, we'll start off with a little basic body care. We'll also consider how you can improve your daily conditions of life, both at work and at home. Some quite simple techniques can make a surprising difference to your levels of comfort. Be aware that we'll be talking about breaking old and ingrained habits, which isn't easy to do! The rewards, however, make the effort worth while. So let's start with some health advice.

You already know, of course, how deeply your state of health can affect your sense of happiness and contentment. Even a minor problem such as a cold can alter your mood as you become absorbed in the discomfort of its symptoms. The opposite is also true: a sense of physical wellbeing, strength and energy induces an optimistic frame of mind. You may imagine that this concept is a modern one, but that's far from being the case – it goes back at least as far as the 11th century, when the great Persian doctor and philosopher Avicenna based his medical advice on it.

So when considering your happiness, the obvious place to start is with the body, remembering that physical health can't really be treated as a separate subject. Therefore you should be careful not to reject some of the odder prescriptions we'll be looking at on the grounds that they sound quaint, because these remedies are intended to benefit the whole person.

There is one more thing to remember about this advice, and it is all-important. According to the ancient wisdom, health is not an end in itself. After all, health itself has no value unless you put it to some use. However, the healthy person will be better able to think clearly, be creative and relate to others in the most positive way. All our attention in this book is focusing on the nature of the good life. That doesn't mean just a hedonistic pursuit of

pleasure – as we'll soon see, that kind of life won't actually make you happy for long – but a life that brings deep satisfaction because it is being lived well. What is the good of being healthy if you do not use your health for good ends? The healthy body is a useful tool, and the wise prefer not to be enslaved to the desires and needs of the body. After all, happiness lies in freedom.

Nine guides

We'll be looking at teachings from the ancient wisdom that were originally intended for scholars and intellectuals. That might surprise you – can you really consider yourself an intellectual? The answer is yes, in this context. The advice we'll be discussing is specifically aimed at a style of life that's immediately recognizable: that of someone who spends a great deal of time sitting down either talking or writing. In ancient times, nobody except a scholar would be found sitting all day at a desk, straining their eyes by reading and writing and suffering the other drawbacks of a sedentary way of life, but these days the description is applicable to a wide range of jobs and lifestyles.

Think about how this relevant to you. Ten to one you are in an office job, sitting all day staring at a computer screen and writing thousands of words in emails and reports. Exercise is something that has to be factored into life rather than being an inherent part of the daily routine. Tired at the end of a day spent at your desk, you sit on public transport or in your car, then spend the evening sitting down again – this time in front of the television. Even if you live a more active life, you're likely to spend quite a lot of time in front of a screen for work and pleasure. The problems we face from living this way are exactly the same as those suffered by the scholars of former days, and we can all benefit from the ancient teachings.

First of all, let's be under no illusions that work done sitting down must be easy; mental effort, whether for academic study or practical reasons, is extremely demanding on both mental and physical levels. Talking to people, writing, planning – these all take huge amounts of energy. And although that energy is drained from the mind rather than the body, you will feel it physically as well as in a sense of mental exhaustion. Hence the tendency to flop in front of the television once you get home,

when that's really not at all what's required to be healthy and happy.

In order to stay well and get the most out of life, you require support. Since we're looking at health holistically, this means considering three levels of existence that correspond to body, mind and spirit. On each of these levels, you need three guides. Let's start with the physical, practical world. Here, you ideally require access to a father, a teacher and a doctor.

The father is not necessarily your real parent – 'father' is used symbolically, to describe a person who is expected to know his or her child well enough to guide their choice of study or career and their general approach to living. The role can be taken on not only by either or both parents but also by friends – people who know you well enough to understand where your talents and inspiration lie. Such support and advice is relevant not only at the beginning of adult life but throughout the working years and beyond, for as time passes we change, mature and develop in different directions. We all need encouragement from people who understand us.

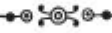
Next, the teacher. If you are a student, you will be well equipped with tutors, but who fills that role if you are working for a living? It can be someone who provides training, or a colleague or superior who passes on their knowledge, allowing you to extend your skills and refine your abilities so that you can develop your career as well as finding more satisfaction in your tasks. But you need teachers for more than work and study: you need them for the process of life itself. They may come in many forms, from a friend whose example you admire and emulate to a spiritual counsellor.

As for the doctor, that's just common sense, since we all rely on one from time to time. However, here too you might consider what role your doctor fills in your life and whether you're happy with it.

You should also think about your attitude to medicine. The ideal is to rely as much as possible on diet and exercise for good health, rather than living an unhealthy lifestyle and propping yourself up with vitamin pills, painkillers and trips to the doctor. That's not to say that you shouldn't get medical help when it's needed – far from it! But living well can work as preventive

medicine, helping to keep ailments at bay.

In this matter, as in everything in this book, you should use your own judgement. Ideally, as you become more attuned to your bodily needs and rhythms it should become second nature to you to know when to resort to medicine and when to leave it alone.



Three guides

- At this point, it can prove helpful to sit down quietly with pen and paper and identify who fills these three roles in your life. Perhaps it's easy to name friends, relatives and colleagues who can be relied upon to offer guidance and support. You may find that you are well supported on one or two levels but need a little extra support elsewhere.
- You might feel in need of a 'father' to give you general advice and guidance. If that's the case, try casting around your circle of acquaintance to see if there's anyone whose opinion you would value. Such people are worth cultivating. Now it's up to you to make contact and establish the kind of relationship you require. But remember, every relationship is a two-way street! You can't just expect to get what you want from someone without giving back in return – whether that works out as offering friendship or even your own special knowledge.
- If you think you lack a teacher, pinpoint some areas in which you'd like to develop your abilities. If it's at work, sign up for some courses, or ask your boss for advice. Perhaps you have a creative talent you feel could be developed by means of some local evening classes; if you wish for spiritual guidance, ask yourself which religious tradition most attracts you and get involved. What you are doing in all these areas is expanding and improving on the areas of life where you can be happiest, fulfilling yourself by using your knowledge, talents and skills as best as you can.

- And if you're not happy with your doctor, register at another surgery, or look into other kinds of available treatment. But for now, read on!

Your inner guides

You should now have made a good start on identifying your guides for living in the world. Next, you look inside yourself to find three inner guides from a non-physical level: these are qualities of character, or of soul. You need strong willpower, intelligence and a good memory. This sounds rather demanding, and you might think you lack one or more of the three – perhaps the good memory, which many people feel is beyond them. But actually, we all have these qualities in abundance when we find something to do that interests us. Just think for a moment of how dramatically your mood changes when you move from doing something that bores you to a task you really enjoy. It's as if you wake up, both physically and mentally: your energy picks up, you get ideas, the world seems a brighter place.

However, the opposite is true as well. If you have to spend a lot of time doing uncongenial tasks, you'll tend to scrape through with the least possible effort. You might be able to summon up the willpower to make a good start, but it's extremely difficult to sustain that momentum – and even if the task is simple you'll be likely to make mistakes, because you're not mentally engaged. Without willpower, mental alertness and the energy to remember how to do your job easily and well, you'll find constant distractions undermining your ability to focus. If this is the case, you need to stop and ask yourself why you are living in this way. Is it something that you have to do in order to reach an important and desirable goal? In that case, you simply have to do your best until the task is finished. Or are you doing it out of habit? If that's true, should you perhaps be finding some other way of spending your time?

Three classical guides

The last group of three guides addresses just these issues. Here is where we step out of the mundane and into the magical, for these guides enlarge the picture to include the cosmos. Now we invoke

three classical gods who are also familiar to astrology in their planetary identities: Mercury, Apollo (the Sun) and Venus. Mercury, who is associated with the mind, inspires us to study or work at whatever fascinates us, thus strengthening our will and energy. Apollo floods spiritual and intellectual light upon us, conferring understanding and intelligence. Finally, Venus, the goddess of love, encourages us to enjoy our work or study.

The idea of invoking gods may seem odd to you at this stage, but as you read on you will begin to feel more comfortable with the idea. For now, let's just say that you want to open yourself up and feel connected with the universe in order to draw on its powers for good when your own resources of enthusiasm and intelligence are worn a little thin. This is a way of acknowledging that we all sometimes need help in life. None of us has all the answers, nor should we feel that that makes us inadequate in any way: it's simply part of being a human being. But happily, there are energies out there far superior to our own, on which we can call when in need.

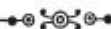
You'll find out later on how to perform rituals for summoning divine forces into your life. At this point, you can just think of the three gods mentioned in a symbolic way. Put simply, it's clear enough that you need to feel interested in whatever activity you undertake (Mercury), understand it (Apollo) and enjoy it (Venus).

Now, anyone who sets out in life without the support of these guides is going to have a bit of a tough time. Just cast your mind back to your schooldays, when you had to endure regular lessons in subjects you found difficult or that were poorly taught, and you will see exactly how this feels. Remember the subject you most disliked – it may be maths, English or perhaps sports. What a struggle it was to get through classes where you simply didn't understand what was going on! How embarrassing when you got things wrong! But before you begin to feel too bad about yourself, be assured that everyone has a weak spot: we all feel the same about one subject or another.

But maybe you feel similarly about your daily work? Your emotions are likely to be considerably less extreme, because unless you've been forced into a job against your will, you will have chosen to do something that uses your talents in some way. But all kinds of factors can make work trying. You might be made

to work to low standards that don't satisfy you, or you might have developed interests or skills that aren't being addressed. If any of your negative feelings from schooldays feel familiar, you need to consult the guides in order to make changes at work or even to find a more congenial occupation.

We're not just talking about work or study here, though, but about your whole life. However you are spending your time, if you're not fully engaged in it and inspired by it, then something is wrong. It's so easy to drift into a way of life that doesn't really suit you, and to remain in it thanks to inertia. Perhaps you're living with friends and going out a lot, but secretly longing for some peace and quiet to sit alone and read. Maybe you live in a small village but would like the cultural stimulation of city life. Everyone's needs are different and complex.



What you love

- Try to identify the following. What piques your interest? Which activity comes so easily to you that you can't understand how others might find it difficult? What do you really love doing? Can you bring all three of these areas together to identify one occupation or activity? Even if you can't satisfy three needs, try to pinpoint some way of living that includes two. That's a good start!
- Maybe you know exactly where your talents lie and what you're happiest doing, but you rarely have time for your favourite activity. In that case, try to work out how to restructure your life so as to create more time. Maybe you don't need to work full-time, for example – or perhaps you love your career and want to spend more time at work!

Balancing the elements

But now, let's get back to the doctor for a moment. Just as runners look after their legs and singers take care of their voices, so should people who work with their minds pay close attention to mental and emotional health. Not only must the mind have

special care, but your general health and digestion are also affected by a sedentary life and tough mental work. A person who sits at a desk all day, reading or writing, is going to feel very different from one who is engaged in physical labour out in the fresh air, exercising their muscles, getting a good appetite and falling easily into an exhausted sleep at night. Those of us who are desk workers lack exercise and fresh air, we become stiff and develop bad posture, we have no appetite or overeat for comfort and then we have no way to work off the calories. What's more, we become dull and unable to think clearly – or go to the opposite extreme, developing an over-active imagination that broods, gets things out of proportion and dreams up all kinds of anxieties.

The way we're going to look at the human organism – mind and emotions as well as body – is rather different from the modern medical approach. However, it has an immensely long history in almost all cultures. In the West, it comes down to us from the ancient Greeks. Their model of health depends on a good balance between four forces known as the humours and based on the elements of earth, air, fire and water.

The humours or elements are not meant to be taken literally; they're subtle forces that manifest in both physical and non-physical ways. For example, too much water produces a phlegmatic person, bogged down and stagnant; too much fire causes anger and irritation; an excess of air makes someone restless and easily bored, while a lot of earth weighs down the sufferer with melancholy. Each of these psychological types is vulnerable to particular physical weaknesses. The sedentary worker is particularly prey to the earthy problem, and can hardly help but suffer from what is called black bile.

Why is this so, and what are the effects? We find causes on three levels, just as we found guides of various kinds. First, there's a cosmic cause. The planets associated with mental effort are Mercury (as you already know) and Saturn. Now, astrologically speaking, these planets are cold and dry, like the earthy nature of melancholy. You imitate the nature of these planets when you bury yourself in books, emails, websurfing and correspondence, withdrawing your attention from practical matters and becoming oblivious to the world outside.

Then comes the second cause, the natural one. The harder you work and the more intently you concentrate, the more you compress your energy in the centre of your being so that it becomes cold and hard just like the planets. After a bout of such effort your mind, lacking the vital and expansive forces of fire and air, feels heavy. If you think about all this, you can feel it quite strongly – just think, for example, what an effort it is to refocus on the world around you once you've been online for a long time. This squeezing in of energy has a psychological effect. Even though you may have been enjoying what you were doing, you might feel rather low afterwards. Your energy has been constricted, and it can't just spring back into a vibrant state. This is the third cause, the human or emotional one.

What's more, all the energy directed towards the mind leaves the stomach and liver unattended, so that digestion becomes poor. Dark, thick vapours settle on you that can only be dispersed by exercise. These vapours can be taken in two senses: a physical one suggestive of digestive problems and an emotional one that describes the darkness of low spirits or melancholy.

Black bile is fine in its place. Ideally, you need some of it to ground you and help you to achieve a state of physical harmony, with the four humours brought into a state of balance. You will then enjoy good health and emotional stability. But once black bile has the upper hand, it overwhelms the benefits that the other humours bring and makes the sufferer rather moody, tending to swing between extremes of over-excitement and depression. The thinker, plagued with such problems, certainly seems to be in need of dietary advice and emotional support. But can you recognize yourself in this description of the melancholy worker with words? Almost certainly you can, although the process may take time.

You need to be able to recognize melancholy in order to treat it. Once a popular concept, this particular kind of sadness was seen simultaneously as a burden and desirable proof of intelligence and sensitivity. It is a physical condition as well as a sickness of the soul. Everybody has moments of feeling low, sad and restless. Maybe you yearn for something without knowing exactly what it is. Perhaps you feel unfulfilled, lacking some vital element of life without being able to put your finger on what it

might be. You may listen again and again to a poignant piece of music that conjures up a pain that's somehow enjoyably sweet. All these are forms of melancholy, and advice given in the wisdom tradition is thus relevant to us all.

How do you start to treat your melancholy? You need to begin by finding out how you really, truly feel. Surely, you might say, I know that already! But that's possibly not so. Introspection is out of fashion, and we're encouraged to fill every single minute of our lives with sounds or images coming from outside ourselves. They fill our senses and affect our feelings, occupying our minds and leaving little room for our own thoughts. The one voice you rarely hear is your own: your inner voice. How, then, can you know what you're feeling, except in reaction to the constant stimulation of television, music or the internet?

Even if you do become aware that you're a little unhappy, everything around conspires to tempt you to escape from the feeling. When you feel low, you can instantly have a drink or munch some comfort food. You never need be without distraction: you can turn on the television or the computer or phone friends. These are not bad things in themselves, but they make it difficult to stay with your emotions. We all spend a lot of our lives running away from our feelings.

Appreciation of a mood requires turning the attention within yourself and a measure of inner silence. These qualities can be nurtured in meditation, but also at many points during the day – while walking, or sitting on a bus, or simply idling at home. But increasingly we tend to see such precious moments as 'dead air time' and fill them with noise and distraction. So now let's set about discovering your inner voice.



Hearing your true voice

- Find some time to be alone, away from family, flatmates and friends. Then, the first thing you need to do is turn off whatever might be filling your ears with noise: phone, iPod, radio, television. Even if it's only background noise, shut it off so that nothing more than the incidental noises

of the house or street can be heard. Switch off all phones – you're incommunicado for a short while. Then turn off visually: put away your magazine or book, shut down the computer.

- Now sit comfortably and do nothing. You'll probably find that's more difficult than it sounds! At first you're likely to feel twitchy and perhaps vaguely guilty as well, as if you ought to be busy with something or other, but stay with it, listen to the rhythm of your breathing, and you'll calm down. Now you can turn your attention within, to your thoughts and feelings. At first these may seem jumbled and unclear, but be patient – they will settle and finally the inner landscape will begin to reveal itself. You may be surprised to realize how you feel, or what your true desires are.
- You may need to try this exercise a few times before your feelings become clear. Be patient – the effort will be worth while. Once you know how you're feeling, you can begin to do something about it and plan to make positive changes.

The value of looking within like this is that it truly does help you to develop the positive aspects of life and cope with the drawbacks. So, rather than doing everything in your power to avoid moments of sadness, you face your feelings and deal with them. You will begin to relish your joys more fully too, once distractions have been kept in their place. Learning to listen to your feelings can lead to the discovery of true pleasure and the ability to find happiness in any circumstances. All the exercises and advice in this book will lead you towards this ultimate point – but for now let's continue simply with some very basic advice.

Three monsters

The ancient wisdom tradition does not see sedentary life as boring. Such a life is symbolized as a journey by sea and land, wherein the traveller is beset by various dangers. The sea represents the physical constitution, and here we have to navigate between the problems of succumbing to dullness and

inertia on the one hand or anxiety and an over-active imagination on the other. We've just looked at the perils of this voyage in our discussion of melancholy. However, if we travel by land, we meet troubles in the shape of monsters from the outside world: the temptations of excessive sex, food and drink, and sleep. Each of these has its place in our lives – a very important and fundamental place – but if indulged in to excess, they distract us from finding true happiness. Hence it's vital to know how to handle them, otherwise our lives are thrown out of harmony. Remember, this is all about keeping the four humours in balance.

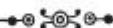
Once again, we enter the realm of the gods. The goddess Venus sends the first monster – desire – to tempt us, and we must be as heroic as Hercules in order to crush it. It was a conviction from ancient times that too much sex exhausts the whole body, making serious work and concentration impossible. We are not so much talking here about the act of making love as about the time and energy that can be absorbed by thinking about it: the way in which desire can dominate thought and feeling to the point where it becomes impossible to turn away from it. We get such a buzz from desire that nothing else seems interesting. Giving ourselves up to this feeling can be a languorous, thrilling experience, but sometimes it can trip us up.

The human being is probably the most intelligent of all creatures, but when desire enters the picture, we can behave with astonishing stupidity. Passion is opposed to intelligence; desire has nothing to do with common sense. Each has its place, but when you are working, thinking or simply living your life then you should be able to do so without sensual distraction.

Since sex is such an extraordinarily powerful force, it is truly necessary to use Herculean strength to overcome its allure. It takes practice, but it can be done: it's just a matter of choice. Each time you choose to turn your mind away from desire, you strengthen your ability to control your thoughts – and not just on this subject, either.

Choosing what to think rather than being the passive plaything of endless trains of thought is a key to real happiness, and this is an excellent place to start. You don't need to deny yourself desire: just keep it from taking over other areas of your life. It may help to realize that not everybody is obsessed with the object of your

passion and your friends will probably be grateful if you manage to chat for an evening without going on about your beloved. Similarly, your colleagues will appreciate your being able to work without making careless mistakes. Remember, life is all about harmony and balance. Desire is important, but it will be all the more pleasurable if not worn thin by being constantly brooded upon.



Mind-training for happiness

- Controlling your thoughts is something that takes time to learn, so it's a good idea to start now! First, you need to keep a watchful eye on your thoughts. You've already learned how to listen to your inner voice, so this should come fairly easily. Spot your inappropriate thoughts when they start distracting you from what's going on. You might be in a meeting at work, or trying to listen to a friend's problems and offer advice.
- This is your moment! Make an effort and decide to concentrate on the matter in hand. Wrench your thoughts away from the object of your desire and turn deliberately towards what you're engaged in right now. Your mind will balk at this, but be strong. Promise yourself you'll indulge in some sensual thoughts later, when you have nothing else to do.
- Repeat this process again and again, as many times as the inappropriate thought returns – as it will, because it's strong! This technique of mind-training is incredibly powerful. As you begin to get used to it, you will realize that you can use it to turn aside from all kinds of unwanted thoughts, such as worries and anxieties that are fretting at you. Try to practise it frequently. This is a big step towards learning that you can take control of your inner weather – and choose to be happy.

The second monster

So, you've learnt that you can rout the first monster, sent by Venus. The second monster belongs to a duet of deities: Ceres the goddess of grain and Bacchus the wine god. Food and drink can be as addictive as sex and, as before, the advice is to be moderate rather than denying yourself. The problems caused by excess are very real. The wisdom teachings tell us that too much alcohol fills the head with fumes and makes coherent thought impossible. And eating too much diverts the body's energy towards digestion, leaving little free for the mind to use. What's more, a large and indigestible meal produces heavy, dulling vapours that cloud the mind.

Of course, we know that's right on both counts, but both food and drink are pleasures that we might sometimes feel we deserve in abundance after a hard day or a disappointment. Once again, as with tuning in to your feelings, you need to become aware of what you truly feel like when you're eating and drinking. If you're honest, you more than likely know when you've had enough, but the mind is greedier than the body and tends to carry on wanting more. What's more, we are so unused to listening to our bodies that we seldom realize when we're full. This is a question of judgement rather than restraint: just as you've learned to listen to your feelings, you need to pay heed to your body. Once you start to eat and drink more sensibly than before, you'll also feel better about yourself as well as physically more comfortable.

The temptation of Hecate

The third monster belongs to the goddess of night and magic, Hecate. The person who spends most of the day sitting indoors is liable to sleep poorly and possibly at the wrong times. The temptation here is to cut loose in your spare time, stay up too late and then get up late the following morning, or to sleep during the day. But according to the rules of harmony, this is all wrong. What you should be doing is aligning yourself with the natural order of the universe: living by daylight and sleeping in the hours of darkness. Thus you should (ideally) rise with the dawn and go to bed when night falls. The theory is that our bodies respond to the cyclical rhythm of light and dark.

In the morning, the air is fresh and our bodies enjoy an invigorating sense of new life. Our minds are clear after a night's

sleep and the rising sun energizes us. This is the best time to be active. But as the day declines to night, the accumulation of thoughts we've had and the energy we've expended during the day make us weary, heavy and dull. Trying to do much after dinner is a waste of time, for our energies are diverted to digestion. So it is wise to go to bed early and rise refreshed the next morning.

Unless you're a morning person – a lark – this is unlikely to be welcome advice. But it is not a hard and fast rule: nothing in this book is. These are suggestions for you to try out and adapt to suit your particular tastes, needs and circumstances. If getting up with the dawn makes you bad-tempered, it's not worth doing; what's important is that you find a daily rhythm of activity and rest that suits you. Some people need eight or more hours sleep, some less – but the busy lives we lead may mean that it's hard to establish the rhythm that suits us, or to get enough sleep. So spend a few weeks experimenting to see what's right for you: the rhythm that increases your energy and allows you proper rest and refreshment. You will doubtless have to compromise to fit in family and work commitments, but making even small adjustments can be amazingly beneficial. Even if you are unable to follow your desired rhythm every day, return to it whenever possible. You will find yourself surprisingly energized!

All three of these monsters are very earthly creatures, representing the physical urges we need to satisfy in order to live and reproduce. By learning to curb their power, you're hoping to achieve two aims. First, you will be living a more balanced life and thus feel better both physically and emotionally. You are bringing mind and body into harmony. But there is a higher aim too. The three monsters are at the opposite end of the scale from spiritual pursuits.

The mind, being an abstract entity, is your connection with a higher, more spiritual existence, which is where the true source of happiness lies. Although we rarely use the mind to contemplate or get in touch with a spiritual level of reality, by bringing harmony into your existence you will eventually refine your mental abilities to the point where you are able to experience spiritual joy and fulfilment. We'll look into this rather deep subject later on; for now, we're laying the foundations of

happiness by concentrating on making daily life fulfilling.

A day in the life

All the suggestions you're reading here are for promoting harmony and balance in the way you live. We've seen that according to the wisdom tradition, both physical and emotional health depend on a balance of forces working within the body at a level between the physical and the spiritual, and affecting both. Now we shall see how to care for your energy throughout the day, how to pace yourself and how to make sure that you get the right mixture of influences and experiences to stay happy.

Let's look at getting through a typical working day. First, you need to connect properly with your physical body, which tends to be forgotten when you're engaged in mental work. When you wake up in the morning, start by giving yourself a quick self-massage. Simply rubbing your entire body with the palms of your hands is enough to give a pleasant and warming sensation; you can also knead your flesh gently. Then lightly massage your head with your fingertips. This is a good way to bring yourself back into your body after a night of sleep and dreaming.

What you do as soon as you get up can underpin and affect your mood for the entire day. Therefore it's very important to approach the day gently, without a sense of worry, tension or rush. Also, you need to start off by making sure your body is happy and comfortable, otherwise you will feel ill at ease all day. Take as much time as you need for getting properly clean and using the toilet. Hygiene is important, not only because it promotes good health but also because it makes us feel nice. Only once you've satisfied your bodily needs – and that includes eating a proper breakfast, without rushing it – should you think about getting on with the day's chores.

Here too, a sense of balance and moderation is all-important. You shouldn't work for more than an hour at a time, taking short breaks in between sessions. During these, you can refresh yourself by brushing or combing your hair vigorously or rubbing the back of your neck with a rough cloth (or even just your hand). That may seem odd advice when your instinct is probably to reach for a cup of coffee as a stimulant, but these actions give a natural stimulation, and they work surprisingly well. The idea is that you

keep in touch with your body while using your mind. That also means that when your back begins to ache, your eyes get sore or your mind loses concentration, you don't ignore the symptom but allow yourself time to ease the problem. A successful day's work should leave you feeling both mentally and physically well, even if you're a bit tired.

The teachings advise us that the morning is the best time for vigorous mental and physical effort, when you're fresh. Once you've had lunch, your energy changes quality and enters a less active phase. This is the ideal time to think and plan, rather than write or act. As the afternoon passes, the time is right to read and consider other people's ideas, rather than attempting to dream up original ones. If you follow this plan, you can cover every aspect of what you need to do in a rhythm that uses your energy with greatest efficiency.

As with the cycle of waking and sleeping, you'll need to experiment a bit to find out how long you can pursue any one activity before needing a break. Work should always give pleasure, and it's vital not to go on once it's become a chore. If you really have to complete an unpleasant task, promise yourself that you'll do something enjoyable once you've finished: that will motivate you not to dawdle. But remember that if you have to do something that you dislike or find boring, you'll need more frequent breaks in order to keep the mind fresh and attentive.

The working environment affects you too, and ideally you should be working in a place that's plentifully supplied with fresh air. Humidity is to be avoided, as it will tend to make you sluggish, as will lack of light. If you're not able to choose the conditions where you work, then you can at least make efforts to get some fresh air and light during breaks. This is an effective way of refreshing both body and mind.

All this advice is simple to follow and effective. The body and mind have sufficient resources to renew their own energies without the artificial stimulants on which we tend to rely. If you try working to this schedule as much as possible, you will find that you reach the end of the working day feeling much more fresh and alert than if you had allowed yourself to become absorbed in work for hours, grabbed lunch at your desk and then taken coffee and chocolate breaks to get through the afternoon.

Of course, we're talking about an ideal situation in which you can choose your own rhythms. While those who work at home may be able to follow these suggestions to the letter, office workers will have to find ways to fit into the demands of imposed schedules. But even so, applying these principles as much you can will improve your working day markedly. Just try it and see!

Leisurely happiness

You shouldn't forget to care for yourself during your spare time, either. Exercise is important, however you choose to do it, but it's also vital to find ways of making yourself happy and relaxed during all your leisure time. You can do that by drawing a magic circle of comfort around yourself at home.

We have a lot of stress and anxiety washing around us these days. We're bombarded with bad news from the entire world by a variety of media. The natural environment is in a state of crisis and multinational companies are doing their best to focus our attention away from social, political and environmental problems with promises of pleasurable fulfilment through excessive material consumption. All these aspects of life create a constant background hum of pressure. They are reasons why we might sometimes fall prey to the melancholy that was traditionally considered to be mainly a problem for scholars.

The nature of the human heart has not changed: now, as throughout history, everyone longs for happiness and satisfaction. Despite the complex problems of the world and the lure of consumerism, the answers to our yearning questions are the same as they've always been. We need to develop a holistic way of life that cares for body, soul and spirit, and that enables us to deal from a calm centre with the variety of pressures we face in our daily lives.

We have looked at how to arrange the working day for maximum satisfaction, comfort and avoidance of fatigue. Now we'll consider how you can de-stress and enjoy your leisure hours to the full. This is simple stuff, and that's one reason you may either overlook it or not appreciate it enough. Life can be such rushed and distracting business that you may need to take a deep breath and relax in order to focus yourself in the present and learn to relish some of the basic pleasures it offers.

Let's start with hygiene, which we've already mentioned briefly as part of the morning routine. Bathing, showering and washing are each refreshing and can be used as a pick-me-up at moments of tiredness or mental fatigue. Water cleanses in an esoteric sense as well as physically – that's why babies are baptized in water. Dousing yourself refreshes the spirit as well as the body. What's more, you tend to feel better about yourself if you are clean and shiny-haired.

The same goes for exercise. You might try exercising twice a day, before rather than after meals and not too strenuously. The idea is to relax and loosen up the joints rather than build muscle or develop an athletic physique. Exercise is an excellent way of getting rid of the physical tensions – taut muscles, headaches and so on – that daily life and work can cause. It can help you work off negative feelings harmlessly, and compensate the weary body for a day spent sitting behind a desk.

The choice of exercise is a very personal thing. You might like to jog, go for a brisk walk, or practise yoga or qi gong. Different kinds of exercise can be appropriate at various times, depending on whether you want to wake yourself up or ease out tension. Once again, this is an area where experimenting pays dividends.

As at work, so at home the physical environment is very important. The ancient wisdom recommends that you avoid living in areas that are low, damp or dank. Ideally, your home should be placed on high ground, where the air is clear and clean and there is plenty of light. Air indoors should not be allowed to get stale, so during good weather windows should be left open to let in the fresh air. During winter, a good fire and warming odours can compensate for chilly weather outdoors.

Your home should be a true comfort zone, where all your five senses are given pleasure. The sense of smell can tend to be overlooked, so try some aromatherapy. Natural scent is a kind of spirit, expressing the essence of a flower or spice. If you want cooling, refreshing scents, try those distilled from roses and violets. Cinnamon, cloves and musk are excellent for warming and comforting your spirit. These are just suggestions, and we will return later to this subject when we delve a little more deeply into its esoteric meaning.

Like scents, music is an invisible and spiritual energy that

powerfully affects the human soul. Remember, when the body and mind are afflicted by black bile, they are in a state of disharmony. Playing, singing and listening to music can help to re-establish your natural harmony.



The nourishing home

- Spend some time looking around at your home to see how comfortable it is. Would letting in more light make it more cheerful? Could you be using aromatherapy oils or incense sticks to scent living rooms? Is there music easily available? How can you make changes that will nourish your spirit, cheer and relax you?
- As you go round your home, make a list of things you can change, then act on it. Then, whenever you want to relax or be cheered, you can turn straight to one of your sources of nourishing comfort: light a candle, listen to some music, or burn some scent.

The wisdom tradition's other general recommendations for enjoying leisure are simple yet effective. They include visiting beautiful natural scenery including lakes and rivers, and activities such as horse riding and sailing. Having a variety of pleasant occupations or hobbies is helpful, as is the company of cheerful people.

The teachings' advice is for us to make the best use we can of all these aids to happiness as and when it's possible to do so. It's especially important for those who live in large cities to make an extra effort to get out into the natural world, whether for a long walk or for riding or sailing – whatever appeals to you. If you can't leave the city, head for a park to enjoy the soothing colour of green leaves and perhaps the sight of a shining pond or fountain.

The advice about enjoying a variety of pleasures in good company is deeply sound. It's all too easy to get stuck in a rut, or let chores keep you from relaxing. Maybe there are pastimes

you'd like to pursue but never find time for because you are busy doing what your friends enjoy. In that case, you need to take a little time to do what truly interests you. And as for company – well, many of us put up with people we don't truly like, or who we know are bad for us, but it's much more fun to be with friends who are genuinely supportive and good to spend time with. The overall rule is to see, hear, smell and think about pleasing things as much as possible, and avoid what displeases you. What could be more healing?

Food for body and soul

You can also raise your spirits by eating and drinking the right kind of things. According to the wisdom teachings, the traditional remedy for all ills is wine, which cheers the spirits and cleanses the body of the gloomy mists of black bile. The best wine to drink for this purpose is one that's light and fragrant, so a white wine rather than a more robust red would be ideal. But the advice comes with a health warning: although wine can lift the spirits and enliven the mind, abusing it harms them. Remember that you're drinking for holistic reasons, to find balance – not to get drunk and lose it! Because wine is such an effective remedy, it should be used with caution. In fact, you don't even need to drink the wine at all. Even the scent is beneficial, helping to raise the spirits. Wine can also be massaged into the chest and stomach for a comforting effect, although that may seem like a bit of a waste to most of us!

What underlies this advice is the conviction that what's good for the spirit must also benefit the body. This view is holistic, and thus all these therapies work on a variety of levels right from the gross physical reality that we readily recognize to more subtle levels where physical shades off into spiritual energy. It's in this area that treatments such as acupuncture work. However, if you learn to look after yourself daily, you should need to seek specialist help less often.

As you have already learnt, people living a sedentary life tend to suffer from stomach ailments, so you need to pay extra attention to eating and drinking in a way that supports mental effort rather causing indigestion. The basic rule is to eat moderately and only when hungry, and the same for drinking.

The tea or coffee break taken for the sake of a few minutes' relaxation, whether or not you are thirsty, has only the short-term benefit of the artificial stimulation of caffeine. It is far better rub your neck or take a brief walk instead, as you've seen. Learn to listen to your body more closely and tune in to its needs.

When you're not burning off much physical energy, you need to be careful how much you eat. The habit or temptation to finish everything on your plate, even if you're already full, can be very strong. But if you really do learn to pay attention to what your body wants (rather than the greedy mind), then you will realize that you feel much more comfortable if you stop eating before feeling over-full. This isn't about denying yourself pleasure in eating: quite the opposite, it's about truly learning to relish food so that you enjoy every mouthful. Food should be as fresh as possible, and once again wine is recommended: red is considered to be beneficial for the digestion.

After a meal you should allow yourself two or three hours relaxation, or longer if the meal has been unwisely heavy or rich. Digestion and thinking do not go together, so avoid discussions of awkward topics or reading heavy subject matter until the stomach is settled. And all temptation to nap after lunch must be overcome! In the evening you should stay awake for at least an hour after a meal before going to bed. It's not a good idea to make love either when ravenously hungry or immediately after eating, as it puts too much strain on a body already concentrating its energy on food. However, a gentle walk after a meal is a good idea and very helpful to the digestion.

All this ancient advice is pretty much common sense – but how often do we heed it? We tend to eat for reasons other than hunger, taking refuge in food to comfort or distract us. But if you follow the advice, you will find that very shortly you feel more alert, lively and fresh. Bit by bit, you will begin to eat for the right reasons and to develop a taste for foods that are good for you, because you can actually feel the difference in your body. That's not to say that you should become self-denying or puritanical about food. After all, pleasure in eating is an essential aspect of health. It's just that your taste will change as you educate it, so that good nourishment simply tastes better than junk food.

Re-educating the body is not something that can be done overnight, but it does bring about remarkable results. Don't forget to be kind to yourself and cheerfully accept that you're a fallible human who succumbs to temptation from time to time. The aim is not to follow rules slavishly, but to feel more healthy and happy. As time passes, you'll simply begin to lose the taste for a way of living that does you no good. You'll feel much more in tune with yourself – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

We've looked at recommendations for laying a firm foundation to support a healthy and happy life, taking into consideration some of the stresses under which we live. You've learned how to set up a magic circle of comfort around yourself, both at work and during your leisure hours. In the next chapter we shall look at a different level of existence: that of our emotional welfare. How do you stay happy when the common problems of life knock you off balance and arouse disturbing feelings? The teachings have many wise words to say to us across the centuries, for neither human emotions nor the occasions that cause them have changed since ancient times.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage One
Use this worksheet to make notes on the teachings you've read so far. This is your first step towards using the ancient wisdom to find happiness.
Make a list of the Nine Guides. Think about which you already have, and which ones you need to find or develop. Decide how to go about this.
Remind yourself of the Four Elements. Identify which element is uppermost in your character. Which element would help balance it, and what can you do to achieve this balance?
Think seriously about mind-training. Make some notes on finding time to practise daily, even if only for a few minutes.
Consider your daily routine, and note what you might do to brighten your mood and energy levels.
Analyse your diet. List some ideas for eating and drinking so as to nourish both body and soul.

2 *Storm of Life*

We've looked at how to take care of ourselves from day to day, how to alleviate the effects of a sedentary life and how to provide a platform of health and nourishment for the whole being. What Next?

Compass points to guide us

If life were a calm, uneventful affair, what you've learned so far would be almost enough to keep you happy. However, life throws up all kinds of people and events with which we have to deal. Maybe we could do so fairly easily if we were balanced and rational beings, able to assess situations objectively and act wisely – but we're not! We are pulled all over the place by our emotions and opinions, all of which are based on the desire to manipulate life so that it's one hundred per cent the way we want it to be. Naturally enough, we imagine that's the way to happiness – but in fact it isn't. Let's look at why that is.


Everybody in the world wants life their own way, yet each individual's desires will clash at many points with someone else's. Sometimes you might get your own way; other times, someone else will. However, you're simply looking for control in the wrong places. If you're honest, you'll realize that you can't even control your own thoughts most of the time, and of course you certainly can't prevent your body from ageing. We are all swept along by life rather than taking command of it. There's nothing wrong with that – it's just the way things are.

However, that does mean that some of daily life will not be to your taste, and that's why we've been looking at ways of living in a healthy and balanced way. You have learned from the previous chapter how to create a protective circle around yourself of the kind of routine and healthcare that's most suited to your own particular needs. Once you've done that, you have a safe place where you can relax and enjoy life just as it suits you. But once outside that magic circle, you will need to draw on your inner resources to deal with the ways of the world. As the ancient wisdom puts it, a storm batters us from without, but peace can be found within. Although you may not be able to control much of the outside world, you can learn to adopt a happy attitude

towards events and people. How? By working on yourself. Here is where you have real power.

The ancient advice for dealing with the world outside is based on a few simple principles, and before we start looking at this subject in detail you need to be clear just what these are. Now, the point is that we're aiming at creating happiness – yet we began by admitting that life can be difficult. That might seem odd, but actually it's very helpful. You may be rather reluctant to face such an awkward fact, but once faced, it makes acceptance of every difficulty that much easier. The nature of life is that it can be tricky, so having a problem actually isn't a problem – it's normal. Once you realize this, you won't get caught up in thinking, 'Why me?' or 'If only that hadn't happened!' Then you are left with more time to be happy!

One of the main reasons that life can be challenging is that here in the material world, everything is in a constant state of change. The sun rises and sets, the seasons wheel around. You can't even hold on to a thought for very long; other thoughts soon take over. Everything that has had a starting point must also stop. That's just logic. And so is this: one of the most effective ways to be happy is to enjoy each moment to the full. Once you learn to accept the fact of change, then you will no longer resist it. That's when you find that, whatever happens, you can be happy all the time.



Appreciating the moment

- This way of looking at life is likely to feel quite strange, so let's think about it for a while. Just imagine you have bought a beautiful bunch of flowers. You put them in a vase and admire them, enjoying the colour and shape of their petals and drinking in their scent. You don't ignore them, thinking you'll appreciate them in a few days' time, because they'll be past their best by then. You know that flowers don't last long, so you enjoy them now.
- Now think of a person in your life – someone dear to you,

but whom you have come to take for granted. They're infinitely more important to you than a flower, but there's no guarantee that they'll be in your life for ever. Don't you want to make the most of every moment you're together, and appreciate their unique qualities to the full?

- This is living in the moment. You stay alert, your emotions aren't dulled by familiarity: you enjoy to the full all the pleasures that life holds.
- Developing this awareness takes time. What you're trying to do is look with fresh eyes on everything you enjoy in life. In fact, once you've grasped the truth of the principle of change, you will begin to feel much more fully alive and alert. With time, you'll even find pleasure in people and activities that previously left you cold. This is truly transformative magic that you can work yourself.

You've already made a good start on the road to happiness. Now we need to take a close look at how the world works and what you expect of it.

The wheel of fortune

What do you imagine would make you happy? For most of us, the same answer springs to mind – money and success. You might think that your desires and aspirations are conditioned by today's cult of riches and celebrity, but in fact it's not a new phenomenon. Just as we look to celebrities as role models, so from ancient times ordinary people have admired and envied those who had influence and money. There has always been a common fantasy that great power and wealth bestow the ability to win popularity and fulfil all desires. But the reality is, of course, different.

It's strange that the lure of wealth exerts such an unceasing fascination. Just think for a moment of an untrustworthy person. Say you catch them lying time and again, yet continue to trust them. Wouldn't that be foolish? Yet although prosperity has been proved over and over to be an illusory pleasure and even an obstacle to real happiness, we continue to nourish the illusion that should we achieve it, we would prove the exception to the

rule. We relish stories of lottery winners who blow a fortune in a few weeks, and never imagine that we might react the same way – just as the winners probably thought, too.

You might think that wealth and power promise security. But, as we've seen, life is a process of constant change. The financial markets rise and fall and even the wealthiest can lose their money unexpectedly – and with the loss of wealth goes the loss of influence and popularity. Sometimes a famous person holds on to their wealth but makes a wrong move and falls from favour. We can see this in the lives of celebrities, as reported in the tabloid press with gloating relish.

However, the belief that wealth equals happiness is very difficult to shift. We always think things would be different for us! So it can help to analyse why money doesn't automatically bring happiness, using the ancient wisdom. We've seen how holistic wisdom works on several levels of reality. We're going to consider four: divine, heavenly, natural and human.

Here's where we begin to reach the nub of our search for happiness. The reasoning from the divine level expresses a profound belief that we ourselves are divine in nature, and that the true self (the soul) is in exile here in the material world. Such a belief forms part of esoteric philosophy that goes right back to Pythagoras. This concept may be unfamiliar, so let's pause and think about it for a while.

The story of the soul's fall into the body has been told in many different ways. One version tells that the creator of the cosmos, which some call God and we shall call the Divine Power, made souls – pure spiritual beings. But the souls fell in love with the beauty of the world, and the longer they spent on Earth, the more they became enmeshed in its heavy material nature. Eventually, they even forgot that heaven was their true home. And that's our situation today. You might be aware sometimes of feeling a kind of spiritual homesickness, a yearning for something you can't define. That's your soul, trying to remember where it belongs and how to find the path back there.

According to the wisdom teachings, divine providence ruled that prosperity should be impossible to maintain, so as not to distract us from the search for true happiness: the bliss of being united with our source, the Divine Power. This is really the

essence of our search for happiness and we'll return again and again to this subject from different angles.

Say you've gained a longed-for promotion, tucked away money in the bank, married your childhood sweetheart – but once the novelty has worn off, you feel a sense of anticlimax, a vague discontent. You push it away, because you can see no reason for it. Yet every aspect of prosperity that once promised happiness becomes the norm with time, perhaps even a bit dull, and all you can do to satisfy your urge for contentment is fix your sights on a new goal. So you are pulled onwards through life by your desires, under the illusion that you are getting closer to contentment, but never feeling fulfilled for more than a short time. That, according to the ancient wisdom, is because you don't belong here; there is nothing in the material world that can truly satisfy your nature, which is divine, eternal and boundless.

This divine law is put into motion by astrology, and here we come to the heavenly argument. As the planets move, they form angular relationships with each other known as aspects. Some aspects are favourable, some not so, and an astrologer can easily see that the dance of the planets brings them all too swiftly from good aspects to difficult ones. Indeed, their daily movements can be seen as visual lessons. Each night the planets rise in the east, culminate and then – inevitably – sink to disappear below the horizon again. You can see this most clearly with the sun. The teachings point out that if the planets – which the ancient philosophers believed to be divine beings – rise and fall, how can we expect to avoid doing the same?

Passing from the heavenly argument to the natural, you will remember that the four elements making up your physical being (earth, air, fire and water) are also in a constant state of flux. Once one element has reached its extreme, then it can only decline. And the same goes for your general health. What can follow the peak of health? The law of change dictates that some ailment or other will come along to upset your equilibrium.

One final point clinches the argument: the psychology of wealth and fame. Success tends to lead to hubris, tempting people to forget their limits and the laws governing human existence. Rich, successful people can feel protected by their wealth and hence imagine themselves to be invulnerable. But as we know,

pride comes before a fall. Just like mountain climbers reaching a peak, the rich and famous must either fall or climb back down of their own accord.

You might think this is all a bit dramatic and that great wealth and power are out of your reach. That might be so, but the principles apply at every level of life. We tend to work hard for our money, always dreaming that a higher salary will solve all our problems, that promotion will make people look up to us. But what happens when you get that promotion and a better salary? Within a short while, the money no longer seems adequate and the boss's job seems within reach. Or you might fantasize about winning the lottery, as if money were a magic wand that can make any trouble disappear.

What, then, is the answer to this conundrum? What should you aim for, if not material prosperity, success and fame? The ancient wisdom does not beat about the bush, and boils the matter down to a choice between good and evil. Everyone, if you think about it, shuns evil and seeks good. Even the most misguided of evil dictators believes he's doing himself good. Yet do we really understand the nature of good and evil? There's a bit of a paradox here.

For instance, we tend to react to adversity by summoning up all our strength and skills to deal with it, to change what we see as a bad situation into a good one. So evil produces good in us. Conversely, if we happen upon success and money, we can relax so much that our standards of behaviour slip. While poor, we might dream of giving away a fortune to a good cause – yet if we ever get our hands on that fortune, it's all too likely that we succumb to greed. Money breeds insecurity, and enough is never enough. The same goes for fame. That's because the human soul is made for infinity and nothing less will satisfy it.

You want what's good: that's natural. And if you wish for true, lasting happiness, only infinite goodness will satisfy you. That's what you are seeking, whether you know it or not. Divinity is the only infinite force, and it will never deceive you in the way that the lure of wealth does. It's also the only good thing that will truly satisfy you without having a corrupting effect, because it's pure. So you need to divert your energies from achieving slippery, elusive riches and fame. The outside world is not, by its

very nature, designed to bring lasting happiness. But where do you look instead? There is only one place to go now: within. That's where happiness is. You need to concentrate on fulfilling your true nature, which is divine. That may sound rather lofty, vague and out of your reach, but as we'll see, there are many practical ways to apply this idea.

Such a quest is open to everyone, rich and poor alike. Let's not fall into the romantic illusion that poverty is a virtue. Neither extreme of wealth or poverty is to be desired, since each state has drawbacks. If you're short of money, you have to spend your energies on scraping together enough to eat and keep warm. On the other hand, the rich person finds that possessions and wealth need a great deal of maintenance. However, we all have to earn enough money for our needs, and that means we're surrounded by possessions and property that need servicing and renewing.

So, as with any spiritual path, you simply start from where you are. In fact, you've already begun. You now know that the pleasures the world has to offer can give you only temporary happiness – although they're certainly not to be shunned, for it's natural to wish the best for yourself and your loved ones. But your knowledge enables you to begin the real search for lasting happiness.

You may find this turn-around in your aims rather a lot to deal with at first, so let's try an exercise to test the truth of the ideas expressed here.



Inner light

- Settle yourself in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Be comfortable, and have some elements of your magic circle of sensual pleasures around – perhaps a pleasant scent or some gentle background music. Nothing should be a strong enough presence to distract you, though.
- Now, calm your thoughts and concentrate them on a goal that's important to you. It might be a job you want, or a

person with whom you long for a romantic relationship. Imagine that you achieve your desire. Allow yourself to feel to the full the sense of triumph and joy. Picture yourself in the early days of your success, when everything feels perfect.

- Now move forward in time. Imagine how the situation might develop. There could be problems with the job. A new colleague might prove difficult, or the economic situation may affect your security. As for your romantic partner, as time passes you find they have habits or tastes that don't entirely mesh with your own. They're not perfect, after all – nobody is.
- Now, you might cope well with the problems in either situation, so that both job and relationship are still valuable to you – but that sense of perfect happiness and fulfilment has been rubbed away by the reality of the material world. That's simply inevitable. It doesn't mean to say that you shouldn't go after what you want: far from it. But maybe now you can see that complete happiness isn't out there after all. It's inside – and while you may have to take that on faith right now, you'll soon prove for yourself that this is the truth.
- For now, end your exercise by imagining what it would feel like to enjoy an inner core of indestructible happiness. Think of it as a warm glow of beautiful, golden light in the centre of your being. Sometimes you might forget it's there, but then you'll remember it again. Whatever happens, good or bad, in the outer world, you can return to this stable centre of radiant happiness. It's just a matter of learning how to cultivate it.

The miraculous thing is that once you start this quest, the path opens up for you. That's because of the quest's very nature. For people who are not dedicated to finding true good, nothing really works out well, no matter how it may appear. And vice versa: for those who seek the good, everything can be turned to the good. You are learning to balance your life so that you have time to cultivate a satisfying inner world, in touch with divine forces that

nourish and inspire – and the more effort you put into the process, the more true joy will blossom in your soul.

Finding the soul

Are we perfect? Of course we're not; nor are we expected to be. According to the ancient wisdom, we suffer from being immersed in the material world, which is not our natural home. Our divine spark is hidden inside a complex and murky matrix of body, emotions and mind. Just as the material realm is characterized by imperfection and duality, so are we. Only that divine spark remains immune – but let's face it, most of the time we are not aware of its existence. Some people never realize it's there at all.

Now, the ancient wisdom states that the cosmos emanates from the source of life, the Divine Power. By definition this source is wholly and perfectly good, and it sustains the cosmos by constantly throwing out rays of holiness and power. However, as the divine rays radiate from heaven they separate out and become progressively weaker. Thus, complete perfection is only possible in the heavenly realm.

Beneath heaven lie the fixed stars and then the wandering planets, which are themselves holy beings. By the time the divine rays reach the planets they're no longer as strong as when they left heaven. As they pass through the planetary spheres, their purity is coloured by the nature of the planets, each of which has its own distinctive character. And below the nearest heavenly body to Earth – the Moon – lies the realm of dense matter. Here the rays are further diluted as they enter physical bodies.

We find ourselves living at the furthest part of the cosmos, symbolically speaking, from the purity of the heavenly realm. Earth is where the heaviness of matter almost overwhelms the soul within it. And we ourselves are inevitably a complex mixture of good and bad, weakness and strength. But since we originate in heaven, we each harbour a divine spark of immortal perfection.

You can see that here in the material world, it's simply unrealistic to expect to be born into a life of perfect, heavenly happiness. You can do your best, of course. Behaving well, eating healthily, exercising – these are all sensible courses of action, but

none of them will guarantee you happiness. These days there are tremendous commercial forces trying to persuade you of the opposite, simply because buying vitamins or going to the gym involves transferring money from your pocket to someone else's. But as surely as you are human, as surely will you come up against problems. After all, this is the realm of duality. There's no heat without cold against which to compare it, and the same goes for good and bad.

How do you get beyond this duality? You appeal to the spiritual part of yourself, the soul. The ancient wisdom tells us that the soul comes from the Divine Power and is subject to divine providence. The body, on the other hand, is created from matter and is part of the material world. As such, it must succumb to the force of fate and the inexorable laws of nature. We have already looked at the law of change, growth and decay, which applies to everything on Earth, from a flower or a human form to such intangible things as wealth, thought or emotion.

The wisdom teachings advise us not to resist fate, but to flee from it by withdrawing into the mind and soul, over which fate has no power. But isn't that a bit too passive – to say nothing of cowardly? It sounds perilously like giving up. We're used to a more muscular approach to problems; we expect to be advised to face up to them and solve them; certainly not to run away!

But in fact, this advice is strictly practical. Instinct tells us to run from an approaching flood or an exploding volcano – it's that simple. When the force is less apparent, we nourish an illusion that we can beat it, as with the process of ageing. But we know that we are just fooling ourselves.

So, the wise person stops identifying with the body and focuses upon the life of the mind. That may sound rather escapist and bloodless. However, your outlook on life – your mind - conditions everything you think, see, do and feel.

Just consider an optimist and a pessimist waiting for a bus. The optimist will be expecting the bus at any moment and looking forward to the journey, while the pessimist fully expects to have a tediously long wait that will make them late and cause lots of problems. Both will wait the same length of time and get on the same bus, but their experience will be totally different. Nor can you say that one is right and the other wrong. The situation of

waiting is neutral, but each person will describe it according to their own subjective feelings.

By getting to know your own mind and how it works, you can begin to see through the tapestry of illusions that you've woven for yourself. Once you've realized that all you can truly describe is your reaction to life, rather than an objective reality, you can begin to see the truth. Remember the mind-training exercise on page 28? You can use that to decide in any situation that you'll choose to look at it differently. Then, bit by bit, you will begin to see life in a very much more balanced way than you do now.

Developing an understanding of your mind is a big step towards getting in touch with your own soul, the core of your being that remains unshakeably serene no matter what happens. And the soul is a divine source of energy that cannot let you down. You'll enjoy a support and nourishment that will constantly sustain you, as well as providing you with a deep source of joy that's always there, just waiting to be felt.

We'll return to this subject in more depth later, but for now, it's enough to be aware of the ancient wisdom's basic advice for dealing with life. For although you might be searching for help with problems in the outside world, you now know that's only half the story. As we've seen, you have to turn around to face your own self, your reactions and emotions. Only when you've begun to get to know yourself on that inner level can you begin making balanced, well-informed decisions about the outer world. Conversely, if you try to approach problems with a degree of self-awareness, the very process of solving them can increase your understanding of how you think and what you really want.

Three roads to happiness

There are other things you can do to find your soul, which surfaces in your character in various ways. Let's look at three of them. These character traits are precious resources that will help you deal with life in a balanced manner. You have them all to one degree or another, and you're now going to learn how to cultivate them.

The traits are tolerance, patience and perseverance. You are probably not too keen on hearing about such dull-sounding

virtues – what, you might think, about more exciting traits such as courage or passion? But remember, we're stalking big game here: true happiness itself. Amazingly, the practice of these unfashionable qualities can go a long way towards making all your dealings with people and situations a great deal more pleasant and easy. And once that happens, you'll find that many problems simply dissolve and that life is much smoother sailing.

Tolerance

First, let's look at coping with people. We all come up against those who are, for one reason or another, unfriendly towards us. Often this happens in the workplace, where you are thrown together with a mixture of people who haven't chosen – as friends do – to be together. Or it can be in the family, where emotions can run high simply because ties are so close.

The advice we're usually given is to stick up for ourselves. However, we need to use some discrimination here and realize that sometimes it's wiser to step away. Let's take the example of someone who has criticized you unfairly. They have a certain opinion of you that you're not going to be able to shake, any more than they could persuade you out of your own view of yourself. Therefore, confrontation is pointless. What's more, that person is harming their own self more than you. You might be afraid that others will believe them, but those who know you certainly won't. In fact they will look askance at anyone casting aspersions on you. The simple remedy is to act blamelessly, so that unfair criticism falls to the ground. In fact, the answer to any bad behaviour is to oppose it by behaving well.

Of course, criticism hurts, and your wounded feelings will almost certainly tempt you to hit back – but if you can restrain yourself, you'll be much better off. Responding in kind will only lower you to the level of the person who has insulted you. What's more, doing so solves nothing, but on the contrary leads to continued conflict. Nor is it by any means certain that you will emerge unscathed or even that your riposte will be effective. The teachings offer a lesson from the natural world: the bee whose sting may not hurt a human very much, but kills the bee.

However, we should not lose sight of the truth that we're fallible and that some criticisms may be justified. If you receive

criticism, it doesn't hurt to ask yourself whether there might not be a germ of justification in it. That also gives you time to think and use your mind-training to choose calmly how to react, rather than letting hot emotions sweep you away.

How does all this help you find the soul? Well, here is where the habit of self-reflection begins to prove its worth. If you really can learn to step back, think and decide how you will react to an attack, then you are learning something about yourself. You may even have to admit to a weakness or fault. That feels uncomfortable at first, but once you've admitted the fault, you can do something to correct it. In other words, you bring something positive out of a negative experience – and feel all the happier for it. Meanwhile, your attacker is probably seething away in a state of frustrated anger. It's easy to see who is better off!

There's something else to consider here as well, and that's the principle of non-judgemental compassion. You're unlikely to feel warmly towards your slanderer, and that's natural – but just because you don't like someone doesn't mean you can't feel compassionate towards them. After all, they're angry and unhappy, so they deserve pity. And we're all in the same boat, stuck here on Earth dealing with the ups and downs of life in the material world. For that reason alone, we should feel compassion for everyone.

A lot of the time we aren't even aware of our own faults, although others will be all too familiar with them. So before you criticize others, it's helpful to remember that others are putting up with you. That may be an idea that's quite new to you, but think about it. You actually have very little idea of how others see you: all you know is how you feel inside. Habits that are second nature to you may irritate your nearest and dearest; routines you insist upon at work might be frustrating to your subordinates. So when others annoy you, it can be salutary to bite back criticism and instead reflect briefly that you just don't know how much your friends and companions are bearing in silence.

But what do you do if a close friend lets you down? In this case you must turn your attention – as so often – within. Did you allow emotions to overrule your judgement about the person? If you are honest, you will often find that you felt a nudge of unease

that you quickly suppressed. However, sometimes you just have to accept that human nature is fallible – and what's more, you'll probably remember that you've also sometimes let others down. Only a very few exceptional people are worthy of complete trust, so the ancient wisdom offers us a workable formula: 'Respect everyone, choose one person to love, trust in the Divine Power alone.' If you follow this advice, you fulfil all your needs for love and companionship without risking your trust.

It's a sound plan not to focus on others' faults, for your own sake as much as theirs. Though we rarely stop to think about it, it's fairly obvious that we will only make ourselves miserable by concentrating on unpleasant thoughts. Conversely, if we choose to see the good in others we will become more tolerant and positive. The wisdom teachings point out that everyone absorbs the qualities of the food they eat, but we're not just talking about meals – we are also considering the thoughts and feelings that feed our minds. Just as good food will help to keep you healthy, so forming a habit of thinking positively will, over time, improve your level of happiness.

Let's develop this idea a little more, as it's important to your exploration of the soul. We've been looking at training the soul through quite a challenging process of honest self-examination, but pleasure can be just as vital to soul growth. According to the ancient wisdom, you shouldn't miss a chance to do what pleases you, for true joy nourishes the soul.

You might think that sounds strangely self-indulgent, but just take a moment to calculate how often you are really able to please yourself. You may well be surprised – even shocked – to find how rare the occasions are. The demands of life press upon us from all sides: the need to earn a living, support a family, maintain ourselves and our homes. Most people complain of a lack of free time. Thus it's very important to ensure that you find sources of delight to sweeten your existence.

This does not mean a life spent in selfish indulgence. Strangely, as you become more practised in listening to the voice of your soul, you'll begin to find that the truest pleasure lies in shared happiness. Giving pleasure to others produces a deep satisfaction that can't be compared to any other kind of pleasure. It's an intangible gift to yourself. Imagine that just when you're settling

down to a well-deserved rest, a friend phones to ask you for a favour. It has to be done right now, and your first thought is that it will ruin your plans. But if you refuse, not only will your friend be disappointed, but you'll be left feeling uncomfortably guilty – and your rest is spoiled. If you accept, your friend will be delighted and you'll feel good about yourself. This is the way you begin to lead a life firmly founded on the spark of divinity within yourself.

Patience

We've looked at a helpful approach to people problems; now it's time to consider awkward situations. You already know that the wheel of fortune carries you on from pleasure to pain and back again to pleasure, so you know not to look for lasting happiness in the wrong places. Now you'll learn how to develop a positive outlook on the flux of fortune.

Here is where you cultivate another quality that will strengthen and nourish the soul and bring happiness nearer to your grasp. It's a quality that's practically ignored in our culture, where we're taught that we needn't wait for anything. Yet patience is not only necessary in the search for happiness – it's easy, too. After all, being patient involves doing nothing at all, other than accepting whatever situation you're in. What could be easier than doing nothing? It's refusing a situation that causes problems, not acceptance.


It's true that it's hard to bear suffering patiently, but if you can do so, you find that what is unavoidable actually becomes voluntary. Instead of fighting against life, you accept and go along with it. In the parlance of the ancient wisdom this is known as submitting to the will of the Divine Power. That sounds as if you have to be subservient, but really all it means is that you go where life takes you, entering the flow rather than battling against it.

The teachings assure us that patience turns suffering to good, brings us into harmony with life, and even draws us closer to divinity. We've already seen that the universe is under the rule of an utterly benign power. Thus there is a point to suffering and everything will turn out well in the end. That might sometimes be hard for us to see, but if we act as if it were so, we will not go far

wrong.

There is a saying that you can't force a tree to grow. Everything develops at its own pace; everything happens in its own time. Sometimes, it's true, we may need to hurry events along, but most of the time, we are not reacting to a genuine need for hurry – rather we are simply being impatient. In doing so, we are out of step with the cosmic rhythms. Life will be a great deal more comfortable if you let the currents of cosmic energy carry you along.

You've begun to learn about looking within and taking charge of your thoughts; now let's try using that skill to develop patience.



Entering the flow

- As usual for these exercises, find a place to sit where you're comfortable. Make sure it is quiet and that you won't be interrupted. Now bring to mind an unpleasant situation from the recent past. It might be something as simple as a difficult day at work – one of those when the clock seems to have stopped and you are longing to get home. Feel your impatience to the full and see the results. Your attention isn't properly on the work you're supposed to be doing, as half of your mind is fretting and the other half is imagining a relaxing evening at home. Oops – you accidentally pressed 'send' before you'd finished that important email. There will be other mistakes too, that you haven't noticed. Yet your impatience is not making the time pass any faster.
- Notice the physical effects, too. Even from just imagining this state of affairs, you're likely to have become tense. You may be sitting hunched up, rejecting the situation with your body rather than sitting upright and open to it.
- Uncomfortable in body and mind, you're in quite a pickle. So, take a deep breath and relax. Deliberately adjust your

posture to a better position. Move your shoulders back so that your chest feels open. How does that make you feel? You are already opening up to the present rather than trying to evade it.

- Now turn to your mind. Let go of that impatience. Use the technique you've already learned to turn aside from your thoughts, and concentrate instead on the task in hand. Your mind clears and you can see where you've made mistakes. But you won't be making any more, as you'll now stay in the moment. You might even begin to enjoy what you're doing!
- Imagine all this very vividly. In a real situation, you'll need to practise awareness so that you catch yourself whenever you relapse into impatience or resentment – as you will, for you're only human. But bit by bit, you'll find it easier to practise patience, and as you do, you'll realize how much easier life becomes and how much more relaxed, contented and happy you are.

Patience works like alchemy, refining the hardships of life into gold. And the golden rule is: be in the present. Our imaginations tend to run away with us, constantly turning over the past or peering into the future, but all we really have is in the here and now. The ancient wisdom reminds us that impatience robs us of the pleasures we could be enjoying in the present moment. Accepting life as it is – both good and bad – keeps us calm and steady, well able to relish to the full all the delights it has to offer.

Perseverance

Related to the virtue of patience is another that seems to have fallen from favour in our fast-moving world. That is perseverance. Nowadays we flit between activities, 'broaden our skills base' at work and try to experience as much as we can in as many areas of life as possible. We travel, try out creative pursuits, pick up and drop relationships, always in pursuit of new stimulation. It's good to learn and experience new things, but if you're really going to find happiness you need to slow down. You already

know that the only way to find the right path is to turn away from distractions and look within, and for that you need calm. And following the path to happiness is a long journey, for which perseverance is needed.

All great religious leaders have said that for spiritual development to take place, we need to be tested by hardship. It is all too easy to give up on – for example – a relationship when it's not going well; sometimes sticking with it will enable a new and deeper connection to be nurtured. That applies to many other situations, too. Just because things aren't going well doesn't mean that you're on the wrong road. Far from it: particularly at the beginning of any path, obstacles are inevitable. Anything worth doing takes time to learn, and the path becomes smoother as you progress. In other words, you need to persevere!

What's more, perseverance is an extremely powerful quality that can have almost miraculous effects. Just think – if you give up on a task, you are left feeling unfulfilled. So what do you do then? There's nothing for it but to cast around for a new source of interest, perhaps something that will be a little easier to achieve. Yet if you persevere to the end, you not only feel fulfilled but you've learnt and grown in the process by achieving something you didn't think you could do – and that's very good for your confidence! This whole process is an essential part of the path to happiness, which is all about learning to change and grow.

Perhaps this sounds a little too much like hard work, so let's remember the importance of being inspired by doing what you most love. You need to enjoy whatever you do, otherwise your heart won't be in it. If you look back over what you've learned so far, you'll realize it's about nourishing yourself, both body and soul. That's what you should concentrate on. You're bound to come across difficulties on the path, but you already have the knowledge at your disposal to create pleasant conditions for yourself, and you'll learn more as you read on. Obstacles are lessons, so even they have their positive aspect.

If you want to live well and happily, you need to concentrate on what delights you – and, as you refine your tastes, what delights you will increasingly be what is good for you. That doesn't mean dashing around from here to there in search of stimulation. In fact, the ancient wisdom is about simplifying life

as much as possible. That even includes simplifying your thoughts. You've already begun to experience the benefits of calming your mind and turning away from negative thoughts. Your mind becomes less fretful and jumpy, and as you gain experience you'll reach a state of stillness and clarity that promotes inner calm as well as an improved ability to deal with the inevitable problems of life. What you need is not so much variety of experience as good-quality experience that nourishes the soul. That's a large part of the secret of happiness.

The culture in which we live pressures us to consume rather than think. We are persuaded that material things will bring absolute satisfaction, and the majority of people pursue that impossible goal without ever questioning it. Yet if you're to find happiness, you need to turn right around and make your way, against the pressure of the crowd, towards the different goal of spiritual fulfilment. The majority of people will simply not understand your new values, but if you carry on – with tolerance, patience and perseverance – you will find that life truly does become not only more satisfying but also more suffused with moments of enchanting beauty and joy.

And you will become aware that you are not, in fact, alone. Many others forge their way against the crowd with you, following the wisdom that has been passed down from ancient times and is still vitally alive today. You will find yourself recognizing them as they turn up in your life. What's more, your friends and loved ones will also benefit from the understanding that you're developing, and some of them are almost certain to join you on the path to happiness.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Two
<i>How do you stay in the present moment?</i> Make some notes on your understanding and experience of this exercise.
<i>Think about living in a world of change.</i> List a few times when your life has changed by someone new entering it, or by a situation ending unexpectedly. How did you feel and react?
<i>Feel the presence of your own soul.</i> Try to become aware of the peace and bliss that underlie your busy mind. How easy is it to uncover? What does it feel like?
<i>Consider the place of compassion in your life.</i> How do you show it

to others? How do others express it to you? List a couple of examples and how they feel.

3 *Living with Love*

So far, you've learned how to look after yourself and how to approach the ups and downs of daily life for maximum happiness. But we haven't yet tackled the big question: that of love.

The mystery of love

We all crave love, for it can lift us to the stars; equally, losing it can be devastating. Love can change us for life like nothing else. Can the ancient wisdom be a fit guide for us here? The answer is yes, for two reasons. One is that human emotions do not change as the centuries pass; the other that this wisdom is based on a profound belief that the cosmos itself exists because of love.

According to the wisdom, the Divine Power is innately good and loving, and it's from that love that the universe came into being. What's more, love sustains life everywhere. Because love is harmonious, without it the cosmos would simply dissolve into chaos. Love is nothing less than the principle of attraction, and it holds the entirety of creation together. You've already learned about the unified nature of the cosmos, so it's no surprise that the love of humans has its place in this universal harmony. It can be experienced on many levels: there is family love, and the love that friends feel for each other. We feel love for beauty, for nature or music. But the one everyone longs for is romantic love, despite the fact that it can be complicated and troublesome – for romantic love can elevate us higher than any other kind, making us feel divine and invulnerable. It has a touch of magic about it, seeming to reveal to us the true wonder of the world and each other.

The ancient wisdom has a lot to say about romantic love, which we'll explore in this chapter. But first of all you need to know that love is dual in nature. We can experience it as an attraction towards the higher, more divine levels of being or feel it as a physical urge demanding fulfilment. Everyone feels the second kind – earthly love – for it is a natural force that binds people together and brings into being the next generation. However, not all people experience the other kind: the love that inspires us to rise above our mortal nature. Yet this kind of love

can be a key to absolute happiness, and you will soon be discovering why.

Love exists at all levels of being. You might see a beautiful landscape or listen to music until you feel truly elevated and suffused with spiritual love – but that in no way makes it less likely that someone then walks past who stirs up an overwhelming physical attraction. We are made up of body as well as soul, so the ancient wisdom offers advice for dealing with love affairs together with instructions on lifting ourselves up to the bliss of divine love. That may sound a bit too far removed from your experience for comfort, but read on and you'll begin to see how love can develop, deepen and become the core of sublime happiness.

Let's start by contemplating the mysterious nature of love. It seems we all need advice on the topic, for despite the amount of time and energy we put into relationships, we rarely seem to conduct them successfully. When it comes to love, practice does not by any means make perfect. Why is that? It's because, according to the ancient wisdom, we're not loving rightly. Hence, the more we love, the further off course we stray. There's a simple reason for that: we set off in pursuit of love without really knowing where we should be going, and so the farther we go the more hopelessly we get lost.

And perhaps we just don't take love seriously enough. For one thing, it's an extremely powerful emotion. Under love's influence we can act utterly out of character and sometimes even lose touch with sanity. But paradoxically, love is sacred because it creates life. Love is a 'holy mystery' in the ancient sense of a mystery religion. Now, mystery religions all had one thing in common: they included rites of initiation. These rites would lead the initiates through experiences that prepared them to receive revelations. In effect, this was a carefully guided learning process. But most of us blunder around the mysteries of love without even stopping to wonder what love might be or what we truly want and expect from it.

So, to understand love and find real happiness in it, you too need to be initiated in several stages. As with all mystery religions, the ultimate secrets are meaningless unless the initiate has been properly prepared to understand them. Not everybody

either wants initiation or is suitable for it, but the good news is that you've already taken the first step by understanding that love is the force that creates and sustains the cosmos. And even if you prefer your understanding of love to be rooted in the everyday world, you'll find much to help you in the following pages. Who knows, you may find that you are lured onwards to soar beyond the material realm into more mystical regions. In any case, initiation starts in the here and now of mundane reality.

Learning to trust love

Everybody wants to be loved. The affection of family members and friends doesn't seem enough for us, particularly when we are young: our hearts hunger for an intense, complete union with one person. We see other people trying it and being wonderfully happy for a while, then lapsing back into ordinary life – or perhaps it all goes horribly wrong. But we think we're different: we'll buck the trend and succeed in finding perfect, everlasting romantic love. Optimistic? Just a little! And the longing for love makes us not only ridiculously optimistic but also remarkably short on memory.

You might find someone who seems to be the only person in the world you could ever love. A feeling of fate overwhelms you: it appears that you are meant to be together. And so this may be, until one day when you change your mind or the beloved makes their exit. Then your world seems to come to an end – for a while. In time you recover, and eventually, hey presto! another 'only one' appears.

Although each of these relationships will probably bring a period of ecstatic happiness, they can also involve fear, self-doubt, yearning, loss and devastation. Sometimes bitter jealousy and betrayal occur in the mix. So love is by no means a sweet and gentle god; although he is portrayed in art as a cherub, that chubby winged child holds weapons – a bow and arrows with flaming tips that pierce the heart. Where then is the true, reliable happiness in such an experience? Before you can find it, you need to discover what you've been doing wrong.

Love is powerful but also very fragile. When you love, you are extremely sensitive to any hint of disapproval from your beloved. Somehow, you feel that you are expected to be perfect – and

because you can't help but see an idealized image of your beloved, you expect them to be perfect too and never to upset or let you down in any way. But, of course, none of us is without fault, so there will be disappointments and misunderstandings during the course of even the most wonderful relationship. Love brings out the human yearning for perfection. That's a good thing, but you need to learn where to look for this perfection. It certainly isn't in you or your beloved – but it can be found in the nature of love itself. Your own faults actually have no power to hurt love.

What are we really saying here? Surely it's that we do not have enough confidence in love – either our own love or the love of others. If you trust love, you can relax into it rather than living on a knife-edge of anxiety that you'll let down your beloved in some way, or that they will hurt you. Hence you lose your suspicions and fears and thus relax the tension that can accompany love, enabling you to enjoy it more fully.

Is this realistic advice? It will certainly help you to focus on the positive side of love, as well as making life much easier and more pleasant for your beloved. Should the worst happen and one of you ends the relationship, at least you will have happy memories to recall – and, perhaps more importantly, you will have the assurance that you know how to love well, and that another person will come into your life to receive that love. Remember the exercise you did on living in the moment? When you love, every moment is to be savoured and enjoyed to the full. And you know that since the nature of life is ephemeral, some pain is inevitable in human existence. Paradoxically, it even throws our pleasures into higher relief.

You may wonder how, since we humans are full of faults, the ancient wisdom can describe love as perfect. The answer is that it is, as we have seen, a divine force. You may be familiar with St Paul's ecstatic description of love that 'believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth' (1 Corinthians 13: 7-8). Note that word 'endureth'. Here is where we fail so often, allowing love to be damaged or even destroyed by flaws in the beloved's character or our own, or dissipated by adverse circumstances. St Paul's love is not a fluffy emotion: it is tough and courageous, heroic even. Lest that be doubted, remember St

John's bold statement that there is 'no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear' (1 John 4: 18). Imagine how wonderful that would be – to love without a moment's fear or doubt! Surely that's worth trying?



Trusting love

- This is the second step in your initiation into love's mysteries. You are going to learn how to strengthen your trust in love.
- Sit quietly and alone. Breathe deeply and calm your thoughts. Remember what you've already learned about the cosmic nature of love. Try to feel its infinite, awe-inspiring power holding everything together in harmony. Realize that the love in your life is of the same nature.
- Now, imagine a situation where your beloved has let you down. If you don't currently have a partner, think of someone you like. Let's say you catch your beloved looking at another person with interest. How do you feel? Angry, insecure, confused? What do you do? Mention it or not? Become accusing, make a joke, or brood? How does your beloved react? Not in a pleased way, that's for sure! Do you worry about the moment when you're alone?
- Now reimagine the incident. This time, you relax. You know that you reign in your beloved's heart. Even if they find someone else attractive, that's only natural. It certainly doesn't mean that anything else is going to happen! Call to mind the moments when you too have had your eye caught by someone in the street. That never led to anything, did it? You discover you don't need to say anything or even think any longer about that brief second that made you uncomfortable. It's over and gone.
- You realize that being in love makes you imagine all sorts of problems that aren't there. In reality, you enjoy a sound

relationship. Focus on the love, rather than on the people involved. That may sound odd, but the two of you have created a current of feeling that didn't exist before, and is now utterly real. It's a tiny part of the love that keeps the cosmos in balance. Therefore, it's trustworthy. All you need to do is learn to give it your confidence.

- There will be times in your relationship where real problems arise, but the solution is the same. Focus your thoughts on love itself, trust its power, and you will find you know what to do.
- As you increasingly practise this profound exercise, you will find that you attract a more trustworthy love. By beginning to believe in and look for the pure power of love, you've reached out to it, and love will respond. This may sound far-fetched, but just try it and see!

Let's think now about how you feel when you fall in love. It seems like a passive process, something that you neither choose nor control. You probably relish being carried along on waves of passion, totally in love's power and hence not required to make any effort. But true love is not passive: it's a spark from the divine force that drives the universe, the harmonizing power that keeps the cosmos in equilibrium. As such, it's dynamic. At the very least, love requires you to see clearly that the object of your love is not and cannot be perfect, and to make the huge effort to accept all their shortcomings – even to realize that what you perceive as faults may seem strengths to others.

Venus, the goddess of love, is sometimes depicted holding a mirror. Although love may seem to be about filling your gaze with another person, what it really requires is for you to examine yourself and your own reactions. Love asks you to take nothing for granted, not even the slightest thing.

Although we don't usually think of it in this way, love is the most educational – even revelatory – force in existence; it can transform whole societies. His Holiness the Dalai Lama tells us that in order to create peace in the world, we have to find it within ourselves. Then love will radiate outwards, creating harmony as it goes.

How not to love

It almost goes without saying that, since we're dealing with an extremely powerful force, it's likely to be volatile. After all, we're only human, and our passions can be as fragile as we are. When you fall for someone in an extreme way, so that your feeling becomes all-consuming and obsessive, then something is out of kilter. What is it that inspires such burning desire? It's the longing to mate – one of the most basic, and therefore strongest, of human instincts. But when it gets out of proportion then it leads to all kinds of trouble.

For one thing, believe it or not, this isn't true love. In the ancient wisdom it's described, rather surprisingly, as avarice. But if you think about how desire feels, this makes sense – for this kind of hunger is an insatiable greed for the other person's physical presence. All the lover can think of is their own feelings: the needs and desires of the loved one do not come into the picture (although the lover is very unlikely to admit this). Thus the emotion is self-seeking. As such, it is not love – not even self-love, but merely a disproportionately powerful animal urge to satisfy an instinct. And, since nothing in the mundane world can truly satisfy the infinite longing of the human heart, this urge is doomed to frustration. Each moment of sexual satisfaction is followed by a recurrence of desire, just as hunger will recur after eating.

The urgent, compulsive nature of this kind of passion should alert us to the fact that this is not really love, the source of peace and harmony. Unfortunately, we tend to crave excitement and stimulation, and so we're profoundly attracted to the emotional thrill of carnal desire. It can even become an addiction, in which case as one relationship burns out, another is sought to renew the overwhelming sense of arousal. It follows from this that it hardly matters who is chosen as the beloved, since the lover's main aim is to summon up their own emotion. Thus it is that incompatible couplings happen that inevitably fall apart in a short time. And all the while, Venus's mirror is available – but ignored.

Although passionate love may appear strong, in reality it is weak. Because it is essentially an unbalanced emotional state, tiny things can upset it. That's because the expectation of total

fulfilment is unrealistic. The obsessed lover is pursuing an image, and when reality breaks in it can shatter the vision. Perhaps the beloved dares to look at or praise another person. Perhaps he or she doesn't phone or text often enough. Such behaviour does not accord with the perfect beloved housed in the lover's mind, and since the lover's emotions are extreme, their reaction is likely to be way out of proportion to the real or imagined fault. This is where the explosive arguments originate that damage the fragile relationship. If you're in this state, you're also likely to be given to brooding, and so you will suffer from all kinds of fears, suspicions and doubts that have little to do with the real situation.

Surely this is not a very happy condition to be in? Yet we continue to crave this kind of experience because it is hallowed in romantic literature – just think of Romeo and Juliet. And we long for it because we are thrill-junkies, and it makes us feel more alive than anything else. But remember the statement quoted earlier: that real love cannot be harmed except by the belief that it can be. Once in the grip of physical passion, you're not in a good state to practise trust. On the contrary, you are likely to be riven by jealousy and suspicion caused by your distorted outlook.

By contrast, the true lover enjoys a clear understanding both of the beloved and of the strengths of their mutual relationship. From this knowledge arises the certainty of trust. We can invoke the rule of like attracting like, for the beloved who is trusted is more likely to appreciate their lover and hence behave in a trustworthy manner. Thus, a relationship based on good principles will become stronger as time passes, and hence able to weather the inevitable problems of life.

We seek love because we want to be happy, but even the best relationships have their share of sadness. That's simply due to the nature of life on earth, where good times are followed by bad and health by illness – and vice versa, of course! When our loved ones suffer, so do we. When they leave or die, we are bereft. Such griefs cannot be avoided, but that just makes it all the more urgent to enjoy the happiness that a good relationship can create. Yet, perversely, we often appear to pursue suffering, for it too can be a kind of thrill. Few people will have avoided the pain of going through unrequited love, which is a condition as extreme

as that of obsessive lust. Sometimes it seems that even the shadow of a relationship can be preferable to waiting for a true love to come along.

But what is the point of chasing after someone who is possibly not even aware of your pursuit? Even should you manage to spend sometime together, you will only find yourself in the company of someone who thinks of you as a friend at best, and more likely an acquaintance. It's a psychological truth that the person who says 'no' always has the upper hand. You cannot compel someone to love you. As an unrequited lover you may believe, perhaps without realizing it, that the strength of your love will ignite passion in your beloved, or that your love is enough for both – but these are delusions, and if you persist in them you run the risk of losing sight of real opportunities elsewhere for mutual love.

Can we voluntarily turn away from love? Should we even want to? And are there ways to ease the suffering of a failed love affair? The ancient wisdom has answers that are severely practical and oddly timeless. The kind of love we've been discussing is like any imbalanced state, in that it rights itself with time. Just think back to the definition of health as a balance of the four humours. We can compare this kind of desire – rather unflatteringly – to a skin problem. Just as the itching and redness fade as the infection clears up, so too lust or unrequited love dies away once the first enchantment wears off. This is a natural process. You can help by metaphorically not scratching the itch: that is, by not brooding on your feelings. Whenever you find yourself doing so, you should use your mind-training and turn your thoughts to other subjects. True, at first it's difficult to do and your feelings will fight against it, but it gets easier with each attempt – and it's amazing how taking charge of your thoughts will dramatically improve your mood.

When a real love affair ends, that pain can also be eased. You can help yourself to recover by various means, but bear in mind that it's important to exercise caution. You're dealing with a cosmic power, so go gently. If you are the one doing the leaving, the separation should be done as delicately as possible, so as not to cause any unnecessary hurt to tender emotions. If it is you who has been left, it can help to console yourself by bringing to mind

your beloved's imperfections. However, it's better to turn your thoughts in another direction. Try to avoid brooding by keeping busy with a variety of activities, the more demanding the better. Vigorous exercise is helpful, and melancholy can be eased by a moderate drink of clear, light wine. But no methods of recovery should be overdone: the sad lover is just like a sick person and the aim is to restore a state of emotional and physical harmony. Be compassionate with yourself, and use your magical circle of comfort as well as all the advice we've looked at for curing the blues.

You should now be starting to realize that the whole process of falling into and out of love isn't as simple as you thought! That's another important stage in your initiation into love's mysteries. You need big efforts of will to muster some self-awareness when you're feeling lust or unrequited passion – just when you're an emotional state that makes it difficult to see anything clearly. So be easy on yourself, and don't expect too much. Love is a vastly powerful force, and sometimes the best you can do is simply go where it leads. Only when you have regained your equilibrium can you begin to meditate on what you might learn from the experience. But love isn't just about learning painful lessons: it can be the most profoundly joyful of experiences, and it can also bring out the best in us. That's the next stage in the initiation.

How to be happy in love

So, then, love is not just a blissful sense of being carried along on a warm ocean of feeling. It makes demands on us and requires us to be totally realistic about ourselves and the beloved. Do you still want to fall in love? Of course you do. Love is part of human nature and the desire for mutual love seems to be one of the most primal instincts. From a selfish point of view, we want to feel loved so as to be able to believe that we're decent, lovable people. Being loved makes us feel a little more secure in an uncertain world, and it makes us happy. How then should you love and be loved? The advice according to the ancient wisdom is rather different from what you might expect.

You are probably familiar with the New Age adage that you have to love yourself in order to attract love from others. However, such narcissistic advice is not what the ancient wisdom

recommends. The answer is just as simple but a little more daring: if you want to be loved, then offer love.

Let's think about this. The basic point is that like attracts like, so you will be drawn to a person by some quality you have yourself. Likewise, your beloved will be drawn reciprocally to you for the same reason. There is an image often used in the ancient wisdom, of two lyres tuned to the same pitch: when one is played, the other vibrates in harmony. And it is true that love can call forth love in return, although that is by no means guaranteed to happen. What's promised here is not a magic result: what's recommended is that you take action and stir up your courage – which is one of love's characteristics. After all, you are far more likely to find love by going out and looking for it than by moping at home. That means being bold, asking for a date rather than waiting for the other person to take the first step. The worst that can happen is a refusal and, contrary to how you may feel at the time, the hurt of this will fade and be forgotten as time passes and other delightfully lovable people enter your life.

Still on a practical note, the wisdom reminds us that people with similar upbringings, education or tastes are more likely to fall in love than those without such points in common. Although there are exceptions to that rule, it gives the would-be lover an idea of where to start looking. A sound basis of mutual understanding may not seem the most nerve-tinglingly erotic aspect of love, but it can provide an area of agreement on which both lovers can comfortably rely in difficult times. Every couple is going to have some tastes or beliefs on which they simply cannot agree, and the more common ground there is, the easier it will be to accommodate such differences. That is the sort of thing that gets ignored in the first rush of passion, but it is valuable to try to remember Venus's mirror and take a clear look at what it shows about yourself and your beloved.

The principle of like attracting like does not, however, merely apply to mutual attraction between people: it goes deeper than that. You've already learned that your inner world reflects the outer one. Put simply, if you're a habitually relaxed person you will be quite happy in a situation where someone who is bad-tempered might fly off the handle. It's not the situation but the reaction to it that makes it good or bad. The same applies to how

you relate to people. Someone who tends to be critical and intolerant of others will provoke reactions of coolness or dislike. But someone who believes in love, and that other people are worthy of love, will radiate warmth and inspire affectionate responses. It is obvious which type of person will be more likely to enjoy loving relationships.

Here it is absolutely vital to comprehend that you are not stuck with your personality: that you can change. For example, you may be thinking, 'But I'm shy – that's just the way I am and there's nothing I can do about it.' But nothing could be further from the truth. You've already found that you can turn your thoughts in whatever direction you wish, and you can apply this skill to moulding your personality. That is precisely what Venus indicates when she gazes into her mirror. Love offers you an unequalled chance to look within. If you don't entirely like what you see, then you can do something about it.



Love's mirror

- Let's make a start on drawing the love you want into your life. Sit in your quiet place and calm your thoughts. Now, take a long look at yourself and how you relate to others. Think about all your relationships, not just the romantic ones: friends, family and colleagues. Take as long as you need – this is deep work.
- Do you begin to see patterns of relationship forming? Can you identify traits in yourself that turn up in all kinds of relationship? Don't forget, you're looking for good qualities as well as things you might like to change. If you realize, for example, that you are generous with your time and support, that's something you can work on nourishing. Then you might discover that you find it hard to accept support from others; maybe you tend to withdraw into a shell when others try to help.
- Now imagine what it would feel like to accept the support you so readily give. Picture yourself needing some TLC

and a friend reaching out to you with love and affection. Can you feel the warmth they're offering? Allow it to lap around you, soothing and nurturing you. Enjoy the awareness that here is someone who truly loves you and who can be relied upon to offer help when you need it. Doesn't that feel good? Resolve that next time this happens in real life, you'll react in the same way.

- That's just one example of how you might begin to soften up your personality around the edges so that it becomes less resistant to change. The deeper you look into how you relate, the more you will find valuable strengths to nourish and weaker spots that can be softened and dissolved.

What does happen when you begin working on yourself like this is almost bound to surprise you. The human heart is so deep, so profound, that there are secrets hidden in its depths. We all have a capacity for real love, and the better we understand ourselves, the more powerfully it will grow. Then, as you give more love, so more love comes to you.

So begin to work on developing love within yourself! If you agree with the ancient wisdom that love is the force keeping the universe in balance, you'll realize that you are aligning yourself with something vastly beyond the limits of imagination. In fact, you're becoming a channel for divine energy. That may seem an idea so high-flown as to have no bearing on the reality of everyday life, but don't reject it out of hand: it can be used to guide you through the complicated emotions that love arouses.

That's the next stage in your initiation, and you can see by now that love is a deep matter. So let's go further in our quest for true happiness in love.

The priestess of love

By now, you're ready to be introduced to the concept of Platonic love. However, the way this term is used in the ancient wisdom is different from what it means today. The phrase is usually used to refer to a celibate relationship, but in the ancient wisdom it had a far deeper significance. We've already discussed the fact that

physical desire is not enough to make a lasting relationship. Where, then, is lasting love to be found?

If love is to endure, it must be based on a mutual understanding that survives the dying down of desire. According to the ancient wisdom such understanding, such closeness, comes from the soul. Those who studied the ancient wisdom based much of their learning on Plato's philosophy, and they felt that gave them a special, soul-deep bond. What's more, they were profoundly impressed by Plato's theory of love. We'll look at this topic in detail very shortly, but for now it's enough to understand that Plato describes various levels of love as forming rungs on a ladder leading to union with the Divine Power. This is true Platonic love: a deep soul connection between lovers seeking true happiness and fulfilment together.

However, most of us today are not immersed in studying Plato, so how can Platonic love be relevant to us? Well, we can extrapolate from this example and extend it to include any pair of lovers (or set of friends) who are brought close by participating in some kind of spiritual activity. These days we might feel a little embarrassed about using the terms soul and spirituality, but they can refer to a broader range of activities than religious ones. Any kind of pursuit that involves more than mere physical pleasure is related to the soul. Yoga, for instance, is not just exercise for the body. Music, art or literature can be appreciated in such a way as to feed the soul.

The essential clue to whether an activity or interest has some spiritual content is whether it changes the person for the better. All spirituality is exploratory: it involves widening the boundaries of the inner world; it enriches experience. If you apply these kinds of criteria to your activities you will be able to see in what ways you might be developing – and this is where sharing your experience with a loved one will be most rewarding.

A love founded upon this kind of understanding of each other's innermost being is going to have a far more stable basis than one relying solely on physical passion. Desire burns out, but the inner life, if nourished properly, grows and develops quietly but continuously. Often such a spiritual understanding does not even need to be articulated; it can be felt and that is enough. So there is no need to risk embarrassment by putting into words concepts

with which neither lover nor beloved might feel comfortable.

Plato's understanding of what love is and what it can do was central to the ancient wisdom, so let's look into this a little more closely. We are entering very strange territory indeed, but for all that, it's of immense value to our search for happiness.

Plato set out his ideas about love in two dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. It's the latter that gives the fullest consideration of love, for the symposium in question takes the form of a drinking party during which the guests give speeches describing what they believe love to be. Clearly it was a subject that was as confusing to the ancient Greeks as to us, since several different answers are given! It's Socrates who gives the key speech, in which love is described in the most sublime way. But Socrates doesn't speak for himself: instead, he reports verbatim what a priestess, Diotima, told him about the mystery of love.

Diotima's speech describes how love can be used as a spiritual path. She begins by defining love as the desire to possess beauty. In its most common form this manifests as sexual desire for someone who is seen as physically attractive. But Diotima states that this is not the be-all and end-all of love. On the contrary, it is just the starting point for anyone who wants to learn the true meaning of love. The lover who follows this spiritual path will act differently from the mass of humanity. Try to imagine now that you are this lover, walking in love's footsteps.

Initiation into true love begins rather unexpectedly – with celibacy. If you fall for the charms of a beautiful man or woman you will choose not to indulge in sex but instead use the creative power of love to act with the kindness, thoughtfulness and generosity that love tends to inspire. In other words, your physical urges are sublimated. What might seem frustrating is in fact well known as a mystical practice for channelling energy that would otherwise be dissipated in making love. Because the sex urge is so profound and so powerful, this is believed to charge you with tremendous concentration and focused ability.

If you are proceeding correctly, you will soon begin to realize that your beloved is not the only attractive person in the world – that physical beauty is, indeed, everywhere. Having controlled your sensual urges, you will not react by embarking on a sex spree with as many of these gorgeous people as possible, but

instead meditate on the abstract idea of physical beauty. At some point you will understand that passion for one person – or even many people – is not enough to fulfil your vast yearning for beauty itself.

This may all sound rather strange and cold, but it does express the truth of the insatiability of the human heart, which will run through one love affair after another in the search for fulfilment. The difference here is that you are attempting to become aware of what you are doing, to understand it and to love rightly. That's a very different matter from trying to find one 'perfect' partner to accompany you throughout life. Indeed, once you get this far, you'll realize that everyone is lovable in some way or other, and that loving is about caring for someone rather than trying to get something from them.

Once you have contemplated the idea of physical beauty, you are ready to move on to another, more subtle kind of beauty – that of the soul. Now you will be able to appreciate good qualities in a beloved who may not be outwardly attractive. From here you proceed – in a way that seems positively weird to us – to realize the beauty of institutions, morals, and various disciplines of knowledge. What Diotima is talking about here is really the abstract idea of 'all the beauty in the world', to which she gives the term 'ocean of beauty.' We get the sense of the lover floating blissfully in beauty – but although you have reached a happiness far higher than that of a common love affair, you have not yet reached your goal.

We know that nothing in the world is purely beautiful, and that no beauty can last for ever; thus, nothing can truly satisfy the lover. So you raise your sights still higher until you glimpse the absolute and eternal beauty of the divine. Gazing on divinity, you enter into union with it and find that it is not only absolute beauty but also total goodness and truth. You have reached your goal of complete satisfaction. Henceforth you will lead a contemplative life of bliss, your longing utterly fulfilled.



The ladder of love

- You are probably inclined to feel rather sceptical of some of these teachings from the ancient wisdom. However, not only are these ideas very profound but they can be truly life-transforming. It just takes some time to get used to them and develop your own understanding.
- Make time to sit in your quiet place and contemplate the rungs on the ladder of love. You can decide either to look at one rung per session, or spend several sessions thinking about the whole ascent. Do this as many times as it takes to feel at ease with the concept.
- After some practice, you should be able actually to experience what the various levels of love feel like. So, you find yourself not so much thinking about, say, the ocean of beauty as catching a faint taste of the bliss of being immersed in it. Once this begins to happen, you will gain confidence in the path. But be patient! This is deep knowledge and it will be a while before it takes root in your being.

For now, all this doubtless seems very peculiar. What are you to make of it? Can this mystical knowledge be relevant to you in any way? Certainly it can. In fact, putting it into practice can be extremely helpful in untangling the complexities of love and enhancing close relationships.

In the first place, you can try following up the idea of Platonic love and find a partner with whom you share some deeper purpose than just making love or enjoying the same entertainment. That alone will help you enormously to home in on fulfilling relationships. But how does such a relationship fit in with the ascent to divine love? You may have got the impression that the beloved is used rather like a rung for you to tread on as you climb higher, but that is not Diotima's meaning. The ancient wisdom sees the relationship between lover and beloved as one of mutual learning. If you follow this path, your aim as a couple is not just to have fun together, pool your finances, or bring up a family. It's deeper than that. You explore together all the beauty that's out there in the world as well as in yourselves, and pursue your path towards the enjoyment of perfect beauty. This is love

seen as a spiritual path: it's an alternative to the solitary life of the hermit.

One point that it is important to remember here is that the desire to follow a spiritual path is only ever experienced by a minority of people. The ladder of love is an esoteric path, one that is neither desirable nor suitable for the masses. Since you are reading this book, it is likely that this path, although it may seem extreme, is open to you. But this is a deep and difficult teaching, and you shouldn't feel obliged to climb the ladder of love any further than you find comfortable. The full ascent to the Divine Power is truly an extraordinary mystical path, and not one to be undertaken lightly or without proper supervision and support.

All the same, the ladder of love can serve as a source of inspiration, an ideal that informs your relationships. It can give you an orientation and make sense of how you go about loving. And a couple who share an understanding of a deep purpose to being together enjoy a profound source of strength when life turns difficult – as it inevitably does from time to time. But remember, this is an esoteric path and as such, best not mentioned unless you are sure your listener is open-minded.

Love the magician

Diotima's ladder of love has taken you to the highest level of initiation into love's mysteries. However, these are such strange regions that a little further exploration will prove helpful. Let's look a little deeper into the idea of love as a cosmic force. Diotima states that love is a *daimon*, the Greek word for a spirit, whose place in the cosmic hierarchy is above humanity but below the gods. But the abstract power of love pervades the entire universe, keeping it in harmonious equilibrium. Followers of the ancient wisdom tend to agree that love has a glamorous and enchanting aspect: that it's a magician. These two ideas, of love as a spirit and a magician, have survived in the popular imagination in the figure of Eros or Cupid, who shoots magical arrows of love.

Of course, the magical aspect of love goes deeper than that. The idea that love is enchantment comes first from its power to hold together the universe. The ancient wisdom understands magic in terms of what we call sympathetic magic, which is based

on the idea that similar things attract each other. We've already seen that the universe is one infinitely vast living being – the macrocosm – and that its nature is reflected in miniature in each human – the microcosm. That means that just as the parts of an individual human body work together, so do the elements of the universe. In the same way that you could not function if various parts of your body were in conflict (imagine if your hand refused to bring food to your mouth!), nor could the universe. Everything must be in harmony, and it is love that is the force of attraction and sympathy between the parts, whether macro-or microcosmic.

The ancient and beautiful idea of the harmony of the spheres is an example of the way in which love works. According to the wisdom teachings, music originates in the orderly movement of the stars and planets. Each planet revolves within a crystal sphere, as does the background of fixed stars, and together the sounds created by their movements form a divine harmony. Although we cannot hear it, that music is also innate in every soul – for souls too were created in the heavenly realms. We do our best to imitate these sounds through the songs and music we make on earth: hence the power of music to move and uplift us.

What's more, the ancient wisdom tells us that all the various arts and disciplines of knowledge – from government right down to crafts like weaving or talents such as literary skill – were also conferred on us by various gods. Their generosity sprang from love, for true love always wants to give rather than take. And there is a sense when we are in love of being in touch with the force of divinity, a power that's far more vital than our own. Love enhances life and gives it a sparkle, and we too feel lifted above the humdrum normality of daily existence. That's why we long for it so much.

When you fall in love, you feel as if you were under an enchantment. You see beauties and virtues in the beloved that are invisible to others, just as if a spell had been worked upon you. That is the second aspect of love's magical power. But it is for a purpose: the bringing together of two people in order to maintain the harmony of the universe. Every coupling is, ideally speaking, a tiny part of the cosmic order.

In fact, we help love work its magic by augmenting the sympathies and attractions that already exist in the natural world.

Just as the farmer helps Nature produce crops, so does the magician employ suitable words, scents, images and so on to strengthen processes that occur naturally. For instance, anyone wanting to draw to themselves the divine power of the planet Venus would choose a moment when Venus was astrologically powerful and then perform a ritual including substances considered to belong to the goddess, such as doves, emeralds, sweet music and so on. We'll look more closely at how to work this kind of ritual magic in a later chapter.

In just the same way, you attempt to enchant your beloved by music, romantic words and suitable gifts. That might seem an odd idea, but in fact what we think of as quite ordinary actions actually have quite specific magical origins. For example, roses are sacred to Venus and red is the colour of passion – hence your gift of crimson roses is intended not only to symbolize your passion but to put the spell of Venus on your beloved, conjuring their love in return for yours. Thus every lover becomes a magician! But your beloved is a magician too, for he or she first cast an enchantment on you through beauty and beguiling glances.

Although this might seem quite amusing, it makes sense of a lot of things. No wonder it is so difficult to act rationally when you're in love! You are not your normal self, but under an enchantment that transforms the world. What seems to you reasonable behaviour can appear extreme to those who are not similarly enchanted by the beloved – and that usually includes every other person you know. Is this strange state then desirable? Well, in a way it is not only desirable but inevitable and even a sign of civilization. Remember that love's magic is an art, just as agriculture is an art. What is different about love is that it rouses such powerful emotions. But love holds the universe together, and if we can trust it and ourselves then we too become part of the cosmic harmony.

Perhaps that is how we can best judge love: by its effect. Does it bring more harmony into your life or the opposite, causing aspects of your life (or those of others) to be torn apart? What is uppermost in the complex mix – happiness or suffering? We've seen that being in love is not a passive state, and that you can make choices rather than being swept along. Every spell begins to

wear off sooner or later, allowing glimmerings of clear understanding. An important point to remember is that while under love's enchantment you shouldn't take actions that have huge consequences. What seems right to you now will almost certainly seem wrong later.

Enchantment versus rationality; harmony versus emotional chaos. All the time we've been considering love, we've had to dodge between two opposite extremes. Love is full of paradoxes, and nobody – not even Diotima – has ever been able to solve its ultimate mystery. But perhaps that's a good thing. As it is, each of us has to find our own explanation for what love is. What's important is that you think about it rather than just forging ahead in ignorance.

You might choose to believe that your soul was somehow cut in two before your birth, so that you spend your life searching for your other half; or you can climb the ladder of love with a view to attaining lofty spiritual experiences; or decide to look for a partner with whom to enjoy a quiet life of home-making and bringing up children, contributing to the miraculous flow of life on earth. One thing, though, is certain – that when Eros fires his burning arrow at your soul, you are hit by a divine force against which most humans are powerless. Love truly is a sacred energy.

The ancient wisdom sums up the difference between passion and true love by meditating on the idea that a glance can be bewitching, and that certain people whose gaze is particularly intense and erotic can summon devotion almost at will. Passion is most powerfully aroused when lover and beloved, catching each other's eye, each feel the hypnotic power of attraction and cannot look away. In contrast, the love that's likely to develop into a deep spiritual bond is caused not just by an exchange of glances but by a lover delighting in the harmonious beauty of all aspects of the beloved – mind as well as body. You may not have a choice about the initial enchantment of love – it's a divine force, after all – but you can choose what to do about it, which course to take. Do you want to grab an ephemeral speck of beauty for yourself, or take part in the cosmic harmony?

Whichever path you follow, you find that love is a kind of madness. As we've already seen, blind passion is attended by all manner of irrational fears and paranoia. Yet those who take the

path of divine love also appear insane to most people, because they become intoxicated by the experience of spiritual beauty. The difference is that, while physical passion can achieve brief moments of happiness and fulfilment, the seeker after divine love is able to enter increasingly into an ever-deepening state of spiritual bliss and look forward to an eternity of utter fulfilment. The right kind of madness can be a desirable state – but to accept this, you have to see clearly (and truly feel) that ordinary life is inadequate, otherwise you will aspire only to common love and will not fulfil your true aim as a human being: to find the way back to your divine home.

In the end, the ancient wisdom leaves it up to us to locate ourselves on the ladder of love, somewhere between the ordinary and the divine. Very few people will be inspired to follow to the end the mystical path of divine love, but for the rest of us, the teachings offer much advice on what love really is and how we can cope with this irruption of divinity into our lives. Just by realizing that love is divine you've taken a huge step towards happiness, and if you put into practice the teachings of the ancient wisdom, you'll find that love begins to come to you until finally it fills your life. Then you'll actually experience the force of the divine power that not only sustains us all but also the entire universe.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Three
<i>Mull over the place of love in your life.</i> How important is love to you? How much time do you spend thinking about it? Jot down some notes.
<i>List the people who love you.</i> Make a count of family, friends, acquaintances and even pets. Now consider the different kinds of love you receive, and how it feels. Is there anyone who can be a spiritual friend in the way we've looked at?
<i>Think about the love you give and to whom.</i> How does it enrich their lives, and yours?
<i>What would be your ideal love?</i> Describe the perfect love. Have you ever given or received such love? What's the closest you've come to it? How realistic is it to expect perfection?
<i>Reflect on the Ladder of Love.</i> Try to decide where you are on it right now, and where you would like to be. What can you do to start your climb?

4 *Daimon and Destiny*

It's time now to begin looking at the bigger picture of your life. You've already found out about creating the kind of world you want by adjusting your outlook on reality and developing your skills for giving and receiving love and affection. These techniques alone are enough to make your life considerably happier than it used to be. But there's still a question to be answered – an important question that has a huge potential for increasing your happiness.


Do the right thing

You now know that, according to the ancient wisdom, the cosmos is alive – a unified being vast beyond comprehension. Every single part needs to work in harmony with the whole in order for the universe to run smoothly. And of course, you are one of those parts – infinitesimally tiny, perhaps, but essential nonetheless because you are unique. Nobody else can do what you do; no one else can live your life. That's your supremely magical gift. But it poses questions: what should you be doing with your life, and how should you be living it? Let's ponder this now.

When it comes down to it, this is the riddle of fate and destiny. You can choose, of course, to drift through life snatching at pleasures as they come and go – but as we've seen, that won't bring you any lasting sense of security or satisfaction. However, if you decide to discover your purpose in life, you'll find that just beginning the quest creates a kind of happiness that can transform your whole world.

Finding your destiny might sound a bit daunting, so let's begin this exploration with small steps. What we'll be looking at is making changes in what you do in life, both for a living and in your leisure time. You'll also learn about finding the right place to live for maximum happiness. Of course, right now you might not be able to change all the various parts of your life: what you do for a living, where you live, how much money you have and so on. But you *can* identify where changes can be made, and how – and you can start small.

Even making a tiny change in your habits can be a first step towards bigger changes such as a better home or job. For example, you might pick out some pattern of behaviour that you're not happy about or that you know irritates loved ones. It can be as simple as that: just deciding to be tidy, or not to interrupt, or to remember birthdays. As you begin to break the old habit and get into a new, better one, you'll realize that you're assuming control in this area of your life. That's an encouraging start! At the very least, it allows you to see that you are able to make life better, that you can assert yourself to make both yourself and your loved ones, friends or colleagues happier. What's more, you'll gain confidence in your own strength and sense of purpose, so that it will become possible to start chipping away at more challenging problems.



Changing your destiny

- Decide that you'll start right now to take charge of your destiny. Settle yourself in your quiet place, as usual, and focus on your breath until your thoughts have calmed down.
- Now turn your attention to yourself. Try to identify some aspect of your behaviour that doesn't make you happy. This can be something you personally want to change or a trait that someone else has brought to your attention. It's important to start with something that's not going to be too difficult to change. For example, you may want to give up smoking, but that's a big challenge for most people – so get some practice first with a habit that's easier to break.
- Let's say you're a bit untidy around the house. This doesn't bother you, but your partner gets rather irked from time to time. Now, when you focus on this trait you might find yourself going on the defensive and making excuses – 'There are more important things to do than tidy up! And anyway, I don't have the time!' If that happens, use the

mind-training you learned in Chapter One to stop those thoughts, as they're not going to help you change your behaviour. Turn your thoughts into a positive channel – something like, 'Well, it would make my partner happy if I kept things a bit more tidy. And perhaps then I wouldn't lose stuff so often.' Keep thinking positively until you begin to convince yourself that it would be a really good thing to act in a new way.

- Now, take practical action! Go and do some tidying, and see how it makes you feel. You might get a bit irritable at first, but then you'll begin to develop a sense of achievement. Be proud of yourself, because you're learning to change your life, making someone dear to you happier in the process. Promise yourself that this is not a one-off event; that from now on you'll make real efforts to be tidier until it becomes natural behaviour.
- This may seem like a tiny achievement, but the important thing is that you've proved to yourself that you can change. Don't expect too much of yourself, especially at first, and don't worry if you slip back into old habits from time to time. Real change happens slowly, so be patient and give yourself full credit for trying.

The ancient wisdom tells us that everyone is born for a purpose. That may be fulfilled by a day job, but not necessarily; it could also be related to your home or social life. A life purpose can be almost anything, from a creative talent to an emotional skill such as helping friends in trouble. It's your contribution – small, maybe, but indispensable – to the harmonious running of the cosmos. Whatever it might be, it's a great place to start if you are feeling that your life is a bit lacking in direction. According to the wisdom, everyone's life has meaning – you just have to find it, and doing so is pretty straightforward.

All you need to do is ask yourself what inspires you, what you most enjoy doing, what comes easily to you. Your destined activity should feel natural and easy, and bring a smile to your face when you think about it. It also has the effect of waking you up, making you feel more alert, because it interests you. You may

find it so simple, in fact, that you take it for granted, and wonder why others don't find it so easy.

Even if this talent turns out to be something that you cannot pursue for an income, there is nothing to stop you finding a place in your life for it. Indeed, until you do, you won't feel properly fulfilled. That may not be a conscious feeling, but it will show itself in restlessness and boredom. The wisdom teachings state that there are two sorts of people who are particularly unfortunate: those who can't be bothered to find out what their talents are and who fritter away an idle life, and those who subject themselves to a job that doesn't suit their abilities. But there's no need to be either of those!

You might imagine that you don't have any special talents or skills to develop: that you have nothing much to offer the world. But the wisdom assures us that everyone has a purpose, no matter how humble. Think of a mansion in which the owners dine luxuriously from dishes of gold and silver; humble earthenware dishes are also essential in their own place, the kitchen. Your place in the cosmic order might be either exalted or modest, but each is as important as the other.

In either case, the cosmos doesn't demand of you any more than you can comfortably do. It's up to you to decide whether and how far you want to go in developing your talents. But the first and most important thing is to find your vocation, whether or not that has anything to do with earning a salary.

The ancient wisdom sees people as being essentially active, whether that activity is expressed through physical exertion or inner mental or spiritual striving. You know that spiritual pursuits are those that cause change and development. Your fated talent can be seen in that way, for pursuing it will certainly bring about spiritual growth. And what could be more satisfying than fulfilling your destiny?

Finding your daimon

So, let's find out how you can focus on what you do best. It will, of course, be different for everyone. In order to home in on your particular talents, the teachings suggest looking at your horoscope. The reason for this is that the ancient wisdom has its

origins far back in ancient Greek history, with Pythagoras and later philosophers such as Plato. We're used to thinking of Greek philosophy as marking the development of logic and reason, but in fact philosophy then was very different from how we know it now. Pythagoras was famous as a magician and mystic; he practised healing and performed rituals, studied astrology and taught his followers about the many gods and spirits inhabiting the universe.

Now, remember that we're learning to think according to this wisdom – whether you believe in it as objective truth or as symbolizing an inner reality is not really important. What's interesting to us at the moment is Plato's belief that every one of us is born directly under a certain star, with which we have a particular link. Since every star is animated by a celestial spirit, that stellar spirit, or *daimon*, becomes your guardian. Each *daimon* has its role to play in the cosmic harmony and since you have an affinity with yours, you will have a similar role here on earth. These *daimons* are good spirits, so you might prefer to think of yours as an angel – but note that the meaning here is slightly different from the idea of a guardian angel. This angel is not just there to protect you from harm, but also to guide and help you on your spiritual path.

You may well wonder how to find out what your personal *daimon* is like. Since the *daimon* animates your birth star, the obvious place to look is your horoscope. Now, learning astrology is a complicated business requiring considerable commitment, and not everyone will be prepared to go that far just to find out one piece of information. If you do want to study astrology in depth, there are reputable schools where you can do so; contact details can be found in the list [here](#). However, you don't really need to go that far. You could arrange a consultation with a professional astrologer – that's the ideal way to go about identifying your *daimon*.

Alternatively, you can turn to the wealth of information available on the internet. There are plenty of free online services that will calculate a horoscope if you supply your birth data: you need to know your date, place and time of birth (as accurately as possible). Once you've got your horoscope, you'll probably feel rather baffled by its appearance, but it's easier than you might

imagine to draw out some basic points. In order to unlock the information, you just need to look up some simple tables given in [Chapter 5](#): a key to the symbols for planets and signs, and a list of which planets rule which signs.

You doubtless already know your Sun sign. That's an important point in your horoscope, but the rising sign or Ascendant is often even more crucial. The Ascendant will be marked on the left-hand side of your horoscope, usually with the abbreviation 'Asc'. Once you've identified its ruling planet, you can read up about it, either in a basic astrology textbook or online. Of course, if you can get a trained astrologer to look at your horoscope you will get a much more detailed and precise picture, but for now, just reading about the Ascendant planet will be enough for you to know whether or not you recognize it as an important aspect of your character. It's more than likely that the planet ruling your Ascendant is where your *daimon* is to be found.

The ancient wisdom teaches that each of us is the 'child' of a particular planet. This system of character types classifies people as solar, lunar, mercurial, venereal, martial, jovial (Jupiterian) or saturnine. (The planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto are not included because they were only discovered from 1781 onwards.) Each planet rules activities and trades as well as character types. Some of them you can guess at: the child of Venus will be of an affectionate nature, attuned to love and friendship, and might make a living in beauty therapy or the arts. The martial type will be a forceful personality, inclined to compete in sports or enjoy combat in the boardroom. Children of the Sun are dignified and creative, and they command respect. Lunar types love home life; they make excellent carers and usually have a talent for cooking. The mercurial person will be eloquent, will like reading, and will perhaps teach or write for a living. Jovial folk are sociable, generous and tend towards positions of power, while the children of Saturn are thoughtful and solemn, good at building and organization.

As this isn't an astrology book, it's not appropriate to explore these character types further here – it's far better that you read up about the planets for yourself. Take your time to drink in all the information, and see what strikes a chord.

The horoscope is a complex piece of information, and there are

various other rules for identifying the *daimon*. One of them involves locating a point known as the Part of Fortune, and to find that you'll need to consult a professional astrologer, when you can also look at where the various planets sit in your horoscope. This may seem confusing, but really it just reflects the variety of human nature.

Essentially, you find your *daimon* by recognition – so as soon as you identify with an aspect of your chart, that's your *daimon*. Start by looking up the Ascendant ruler and, if that doesn't seem to work for you, then consider a consultation. But bear in mind that not all astrologers are going to think in terms of the ancient wisdom, so it's better to say that you're looking for the strongest planet in your horoscope rather than that you're trying to identify your *daimon*.

Once you have identified your planetary *daimon*, you can enter into a relationship with it. This might seem a fanciful idea, but think of it as a form of meditation. Remember, you're following the way of the wisdom teachings, so there's nothing odd in addressing a spirit or angel. You can ask for guidance, give thanks for help; in fact strike up a conversation. It really doesn't matter whether you think of your *daimon* as representing part of your own personality or as an objective being. The main thing is that you establish a sense of guidance. As you become used to being in touch with your *daimon*, you'll develop a stronger sense of intuition for situations and advice that are good for you. You will begin to see your life path more clearly, and that will bring you confidence, serenity and satisfaction.



Your magical daimon

- Right now, it would be good idea to practise getting in touch with your *daimon*. First you'll need to have found the planet with which you identify most closely. That might take a bit of work, as outlined above, or you may already feel that your Sun sign describes you accurately. Either way, it's essential to decide on your *daimon* before settling down to this exercise.

- Get comfortable in your quiet place and wait until the concerns of the outer world drop away and you feel peaceful and relaxed. Now bring to mind the characteristics of the planet with which you identify. Think of how they show up in your own personality. Look at your life and how you act in ways that belong to that planet. Feel your affinity deepening as you consider yourself in this way.
- Can you see how this links you in with the magical forces of the cosmos? You 'belong' to this planet and you're a channel for its energy in daily life. Try to get a sense of this planet as a living being who knows, understands, supports and deeply loves you. This *daimon* is absolutely good and benevolent, like a spiritual friend who will always be there for you. You may get a visual impression of the *daimon* or something more vague; it doesn't matter which. As you practise this exercise, the sense of the *daimon's* friendly presence will strengthen.
- Once you can really sense your *daimon*, ask for guidance. What should you truly be doing with your life? How can you take your first steps towards fulfilling your destiny? Open yourself to the guiding presence and put out your mental antennae for answers. Try not to tense up, but stay relaxed. Answers may come as thoughts from the blue, or as the confirmation of something you already know. And don't be discouraged if nothing happens at first. Your guidance might not arrive straight away, but it may surface later in a dream or when you're doing some chore that leaves your mind free and receptive.
- Whether or not you get an answer right away, remember to thank your *daimon* before you end the session. Feel confident that since you have opened yourself to a higher power, help will come. The cosmos runs harmoniously, and since you're trying to harmonize yourself with its energy, your way will be smoothed.

Following your *daimon's* advice, you can easily identify activities and careers for which you're particularly suited. This is simply a

matter of discovering what it is that you've been put on earth to do: what your destiny might be. Once you've made the right decision, life should go more easily because you will be willingly following your fate. By finding your path you begin to serve the Divine Power and harmonize yourself with the cosmos.

Don't worry if you seem to have found your *daimon* but still feel uncomfortably stuck in your present life or career. The ancient wisdom states that it's possible to change daimons by changing profession, and that this can be a good thing. The idea behind this is that as you develop, you come to deserve a more developed planetary guardian. According to the wisdom, the cosmos is organized as a hierarchy of beings, from the Divine Power down through daimons, mankind, animals, plants and inert matter. Everything has its place, including skills and crafts, and thus some professions are more honourable than others and are looked after by *daimons* of a particularly noble nature. So you might need to take a deeper look at your horoscope to find some other planet that offers you a different outlet for your talents.

Remember that all *daimons* are acting to enhance the cosmic harmony, and thus can do nothing but good to those under their guardianship. It's important to bear this in mind if you are to feel confident in your ability to do the right thing.

Friends and work on your destined path

As well as identifying your own unique and destined talents, you can also look at your life path in more general terms. From that perspective, your ideal path is to work with the cosmic energies. We've seen that the cosmos is a harmonious place and thus it's the aim of everyone who's aware of their spiritual purpose to flow with that harmony, and to create harmony where it is lacking. Now we'll look at two ways in which you can contribute to the cosmic concord by the way you live, exploring what it means to be with the right sort of friends and also how to make the most of your daily work.

Friends, colleagues and acquaintances all affect our lives profoundly, yet we usually approach friendships in the most casual way, drifting into them without much thought. But the ancient wisdom teaches that it's vital to choose your company carefully. Ideally, you should spend your time with people who

are going to make you happy: those who are blessed with a good nature. Not only will you enjoy being with them, but also you'll pick up their positive traits. Being happy simply makes you a nicer person! Equally, you should avoid getting close to anyone who is malicious, rude or given to excessive self-indulgence. Traditional wisdom considers such people to have a kind of spiritual sickness just as infectious as the plague: we tend to pick up the bad habits of friends and acquaintances just as easily as the good.

You probably won't find it hard to think of people in your life who take without ever giving in return, or who criticize you in order to make themselves feel superior, or who betray your confidences. Such people can drain your energy and leave you feeling worse about yourself rather than better. It's easy to see that you'd be happier without them, but avoiding the wrong kind of company isn't always easy. You may feel compassionate towards people you've tolerated out of pity – and we all want to be liked, even by those whom we don't particularly like in return. But it can help to realize that such people are never going to learn that they should behave better unless nice people like you refuse to be their friend.

Try making a list of friends whose company is invigorating and pleasurable. This kind of companion enriches your life and draws out good qualities in you. Cultivating such supportive friendships is an important part of self-development. Your best friends, the friends of your destiny, are those who recognize and value your talents, who encourage you and take an interest in your development. And don't forget, this is a two-way process. A little self-analysis can be useful here to assess how positive and supportive you are to your friends in return for their affection. It's easy to see that by developing the warmest and most nourishing friendships you are creating harmony. And remember the Platonic guidelines for relating – that the highest and best relationships are based on shared spiritual development.

A good place to start learning about various kinds of friendship is at work. Even if you've identified your ideal work, are doing it for a living and enjoying it, you're still going to have to deal with occasional tension in the workplace – that's just the nature of working for a living. In fact, the workplace is extremely useful for

testing your reactions towards life in many ways, since it's here that you usually have least control over your circumstances. Whereas at home you can carve out greater or smaller areas of personal space to pursue what most gives you pleasure, at work your activities are subordinated to purposes that you almost certainly have not chosen yourself. What's more, you spend time in the company of people whom you might not otherwise have invited into your life. How can you go about creating harmony here, both for yourself and others?

Although the workplace is one of the prime spots for making good friends, there are bound to be some people among your colleagues who cause you difficulties. You might not be able to avoid their company, but you can certainly do something about the way you react to them. The wisdom advice would be to keep your distance, mentally and emotionally. That way, you will protect yourself against the negative effects that interaction with such people can have on you.

You may also take the opportunity for a little introspection. What exactly about these colleagues do you find difficult? Sometimes the answer can point to spots in your own character that could do with a bit of improvement – and the workplace offers an excellent chance to work on the trinity of traits we considered in Chapter Two: tolerance, patience and perseverance. Of course, those three qualities run counter to workplace habits. Many people relish gossiping about their less popular colleagues. The aim of this appears to be the positive one of soliciting support and understanding. However, such gossip is not kind, and indulging in it simply fills the mind with unpleasant thoughts. The more you repeat or listen to gossip, the stronger the grip that unpleasantness gets on you. Then there's a danger of blowing small problems out of all proportion. It's far better to use your mind-training and turn your mind away from unavoidable difficulties so that you can concentrate on pleasurable or constructive topics. It may be that some colleagues are always going to be a bit problematic, but by now you've learned enough from the ancient wisdom to deal with them.

You might also find it helpful to take a few quiet minutes for self-reflection at the end of every day. Mentally running through your behaviour and conversations can be extremely revealing.

How much time did you spend gossiping? Would you have been happier getting on with some work? How did you feel by the time you left for home – happy or irritated? You know from your mind-training that the more you cultivate positive thoughts and speech, even in difficult circumstances, the more moments of happiness you will have. And when you're happy, those around you will be that much happier as well.

Positive thinking applies not just to dealing with other people but to your own circumstances, too. Here's another way that you can turn your daily job into a spiritual practice. Even if it doesn't give you room to develop your fated talents, you can still use it to make the world a slightly better place.

Many people like to complain that they are overworked or unfairly treated. If that's true for you, then you'll be aware that although it's a way to get your colleagues' sympathy, complaining isn't actually going to make you feel happier. If you have a real grievance, a positive approach to it will be much more helpful. Rather than feeling a bit sorry for yourself, try to take steps to put things right. You might describe the circumstances to a colleague in order to get their advice, which is very different from having a bit of a moan to them. Once the uncomfortable situation has been resolved, then you are able to devote your mind to other things.

The key to turning your daily job into a spiritual path is self-awareness. You can choose to keep quiet instead of getting drawn into negative talk and gossip; you can take a hand in turning an unhelpful conversation into more positive channels. Bit by bit, as you try out these simple techniques, you will begin to find that you reach the end of even a difficult working day feeling cheerful. You have learned how to choose different and better ways to react to circumstances, how to step back and reflect rather than react automatically to problems, and how to get on better with your colleagues. All these accomplishments help to open up a path to increased happiness and satisfaction, because you are contributing to the cosmic harmony.

Working for a living is a complex experience encompassing a whole range of human activities and emotions. Although some people may find work stifling and frustrating, very few of us will be doing a job for which we have absolutely no aptitude. After all, we will have been selected for our particular skills or talents.

Some may enjoy a true vocation, and such people are particularly fortunate. But even those who don't have a strong sense of vocation are likely to value highly the daily routine, social life and sense of purpose that work provides – to say nothing of the income! You can help to increase your happiness by taking time to identify what you really want to get out of your daily job.

The advice of the ancient wisdom is, as we've seen, to work at whatever most delights and absorbs you. If that isn't possible, you should try to find a job that conforms as closely as possible to that ideal. If even that is beyond your grasp, then a job that enables you to practise and develop a personal skill should be your choice. What is important is that you get some satisfaction from work and a sense of achievement. That's very different from receiving recognition from others, which can only bestow a temporary sense of pleasure. Real satisfaction comes from within: it depends on a sense of accomplishment, of having worked well or achieved something worth doing. Praise from others is pleasant, of course, but you are the only person who can truly know what brings you a glow of satisfaction and lasting happiness.

The ancient wisdom warns against working for reasons of wealth or glory. The achievement of either might not seem directly relevant to you – but just pause and think a while. If you have taken a job that eats up more of your time and energy than you like, why do you do it? Is it for the money? And if so, do you truly need that much income? Or is it to quieten the voice of ambition pushing you on ever further in your career? In either case, you might reflect that you are giving up other aspects of your life in an attempt to fulfil desires that will almost certainly prove to be bottomless. We've already seen that the hungry heart always wants more, and the wisdom teachings warn us sternly that focusing overmuch on ambition is a kind of slavery. That's worth pondering if you sense that your job is taking up too much of your time and thought.

Pleasure in work comes from a particular source. If you know within yourself that you have developed skills or mastered a situation that would previously have defeated you, that fosters a confidence on which you can build towards greater achievements. This is true development that has beneficial effects on your entire

character, whereas working for more money or power is only going to develop the habits of grasping and competitiveness. Neither of those is conducive either to inner peace or outward popularity. Start thinking of your work as part of your spiritual path to happiness and everything will fall into place. But that isn't the end of the story. Every part of your life can become an aspect of your destiny, so let's now look at bringing your home life onto the path to happiness.

Heart and home

Finding and pursuing your natural profession, your destined talent, is a big step forward, but it's also important to discover where you are meant to be living. Since the ancient wisdom teaches that we have all been born with a purpose, it follows that you need to be in the right place to fulfil your destiny. There are a couple of reasons for this. Consider, for example, someone whose destiny is to teach. Clearly they will require an environment that includes a supply of potential students, so if they're living in a thinly populated area lacking communal facilities they might need to think about moving.

That is one simple and obvious aspect of finding the right place; the other is a little more subtle. We started our exploration of happiness by considering the importance of health, and this takes on extra significance when you think about following the star of your destiny as well as you are able to. It's vital that your surroundings suit you physically if you are going to be truly happy. Each of us tends to have a preferred environment: some find the pace of city life stimulating, whereas others blossom in the comparative peace of the countryside.

The ancient wisdom suggests that you experiment, trying out various environments to find out where you feel good. The place where your spirit feels refreshed, where you are mentally alert and physically healthy, is also where your luck will be good and life will flow easily. Move away from this place and your fortune will be less favourable until you return and get on with the work for which your daimon has suited you.

As with any advice about life, there are going to be limits on how far you can follow it. Commitments to family or work as well as financial limitations might mean you have to live somewhere

that's not ideal for your health or happiness. However, you can still take steps to make your immediate surroundings – your home – as congenial as possible. That way, you create a private environment where you can flourish.

You've already found out about making a magic circle of spiritual nourishment in the home, but your home should also reflect your life purpose. Surround yourself with signs of what inspires you, so that you have a haven at the heart of your life that constantly reminds you of the activities you love. Books, pictures and music, for example, can reflect and remind you of your passion, as well as being essential tools for the learning process.

This is all about finding creative ways of fulfilling your destiny. It's up to you to create circumstances that will make you happier: that's the way to find your fate. And remember: every effort you make towards your own contribution to cosmic harmony is going to be helped along by your daimon. So spruce up your intuition and take note when things go well or ill. Once you're on your path, you'll find that everything takes on meaning – and the wisdom teachings promise that gifts of fortune are showered upon those who follow their daimon.

Does the ancient wisdom give specific advice on where to live? It certainly does. We are recommended to divide our time between city and country because the city is necessary for most work or business affairs, while rural life is excellent for the health and spirits. The ideal is to achieve a harmony, enabling you to fulfil your practical obligations while leaving time free to enjoy the peace you need for developing a tranquil inner life.

Of course, not everybody is in a position to follow this kind of life, but wherever you live, you can easily travel to a different and contrasting environment. It can be helpful to recall here the advice given in [Chapter One](#) about leisure time for those whose work is sedentary. You were recommended to spend time relaxing in the country, enjoying beautiful scenery and sports such as sailing, and being in pleasant company as much as possible.

This pleasing programme of activity could be taken as a blueprint for weekend breaks that will refresh you, clear your mind and exercise your body. What's more, the beauty of the countryside satisfies an innate aesthetic need for pleasures of the

ear, eye, taste and sense of smell. You can relax into enjoying your senses as a welcome and healthy change from the full-on sensual assault of the city.

However, such an appreciation of the sensual pleasures of the country is practical as well as aesthetic. Centuries before concerns about air pollution became common, the quality of what we breathe was an essential factor in choosing where to live for anyone who followed the wisdom teachings. They believed that air carries the rays given off by the planets, so the clearest and most refined air will contain those rays in their purest form. You want to be in the best position for being showered with the good planets' friendly rays. Thus you should seek out a house that's on a country hill, or at least spend time in rural settings where the air is rarified and you can breathe in the beneficial influences most effectively.

The proof that such air does you good is obvious: it's invigorating – and that is something you can test for yourself. You might put that down to the lack of pollution, but isn't it an inspiring thought that you are also taking in energy from the cosmos? Never mind whether or not you choose to believe it: the important thing is that it makes you feel good.

The ancient wisdom teaches that there is value too in the scents of the country. Ideally, you should seek out the most fragrant places, such as gardens or woodlands full of plants. There you can stroll to your heart's content, allowing the sweetness and purity of the air to refresh your body as well as your spirits. But don't just go to one place for your exercise. The wisdom recommends walking in a variety of places, partly because familiarity can cause boredom, but also because every place has its own particular beauty and atmosphere.

If you can, you should also try to maximize the benefit from the rays that pour down from the planets. These rays are best employed when the planets are in good aspect to each other. It doesn't matter that the planets are invisible in daytime: their rays too are invisible as they constantly flood down upon the earth. When the planets are in a positive alignment, those rays can do the most good. In order to enjoy these astrological benefits you do, of course, need to learn a little astrology yourself – enough to read an ephemeris and see the daily planetary aspects.

Putting into practice all the above information as far as you are able will go a long way towards achieving your aim of embracing your destiny and adding to the harmony of the cosmos in your own unique way. What's more, it will help to harmonize your own life, leading to tranquillity and happiness. You'll have realized by now that harmony is largely a matter of balancing the complex energies of life, so let's look a little deeper into this.

Finding a balance in life

The ancient wisdom teaches that the universe contains a complex of energies that work in various combinations, creating the ceaseless ebb and flow of life. Astrological symbolism describes the constant dance of influences through the movements of the planets. Remember what you learned in the previous chapter: that underlying these forces is the sustaining principle of love, and love expresses itself through harmony. It may seem unlikely, but managing to achieve harmony in even the most mundane areas of our daily existence helps to bring us into alignment with cosmic love. So it's no wonder that we become happier, more satisfied and able to enjoy life! That, in fact, is the foundation of your destiny – to be happy.

Much of the wisdom advice addresses finding the right mixture of such opposites as hard work and relaxation, company and solitude, and foods with contrasting qualities. The advice on spending time in both city and countryside is along such lines, and the same principle of balance applies to work as well. It's especially relevant to those of us who are not able to pursue a vocation, but must do a day job for money while enjoying more inspirational activities during our free time.

This way of living represents one pair of opposites, and it can be all too easy to let one side overwhelm the other. So how do you handle the split? Since we're thinking in terms of astrology and magic, we relate all activities to the planets. You've already had a taste of this, with the idea of planetary children (see [here](#)). Even though the ancient wisdom is profoundly serious, it encourages us to live rounded lives – and that means finding time for a variety of interests, including the frivolous.

Life is only dull if you make it so by blinkering yourself to the range of possible experiences you could enjoy. The approach of

the ancient wisdom to this principle gives it a spiritual meaning. We've already mentioned planetary rays. Now, what we're thinking about is taking in as great a variety of rays as possible. Remember there are seven planets to consider, which fall naturally into three pairs and one singleton: Sun and Moon, Venus and Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, with Mercury as the adaptable single planet. The idea is that by enjoying a variety of people, places and activities you draw on the power of all the planets, thus achieving a state of balanced wholeness. That way, your character becomes more rounded and interesting; you feel fulfilled and happy.

So, you need a breadth of experience in order to express every aspect of your personality – but that's not all. The wisdom tells us that variety is essential for keeping boredom at bay and bringing pleasure into life. Looked at astrologically, that means balancing Saturn against Venus. Saturn rules hard work, while Venus presides over pleasure. And while everybody needs Saturn in their lives – for without him, there is neither discipline nor achievement – we shouldn't forget to honour Venus too.

Life being what it is, Saturn tends to weigh heavier than Venus for most people. After all, the responsibilities of making a living, maintaining a home and caring for a family have to come before personal pleasure. Thus we all tend to be in need of some Venusian delight. But this idea of balance is slightly more complicated than setting one force against its opposite. Life is more than a seesaw between work and pleasure – or at least, it should be if it is to have anything more than a superficial meaning.

An image that's often used to illustrate this is the ancient Greek image of the Three Graces. This image is very important in the ancient wisdom, and it is often seen in sculpture and painting. The Graces are three beautiful young women, usually shown naked. They are traditionally represented with their arms linked, two facing the viewer flanking one who has turned her back. But they are not just figures of beauty: they also have an esoteric meaning. For one thing, the number three is a profoundly spiritual number, present for example in Christianity as the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It's also found in the writings of Plato and in mystical texts such as the *Chaldean Oracles*, which

are important sources of the ancient wisdom. In each case it represents a very basic principle of universal order; it signifies an immutable and eternal truth.

According to the ancient wisdom the Graces have several meanings, such as wisdom, power and beauty; or giving, receiving and giving in return. They illustrate the ceaseless motion of life, the circling of energy, the delicate balancing of both cosmic and human forces. The symbol of the Three Graces is both deep and complex, and we could spend a long time unfolding its hidden mysteries.

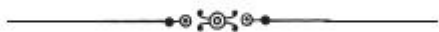
In the context of our present discussion, we can look at how the Graces show us the way to a properly balanced life. The ancient wisdom teaches that there are three possible paths in life: the contemplative, the active and the voluptuary. These lead respectively to wisdom, power and pleasure. But remember that we're learning how to live a properly balanced life, so rather than choosing one over another, we're thinking about finding room in your life for all three.

The ideal is to honour all three Graces equally through your activities. That means spending some time at work (the active life), some in peaceful withdrawal from the world (the contemplative life) and some in sociable pleasures (the voluptuous life). But of course, it's important to remember that for each one of us the ideal balance will be slightly different, depending on character. You might feel drawn to the active life and enjoy pursuing a worthwhile career, but find the pleasures of the contemplative life such as meditating wear thin very quickly. Or you might be a sociable type with a special genius for friendship, but not take work very seriously. It's a question of experimenting to find out what mixture of the three paths suits you best.

There are no fixed rules, although the three paths do relate to different character types. They can also be seen in astrological terms, so here we can refer to the idea of planetary children. Saturn is the planet that symbolizes both melancholy and solitary work such as writing or contemplation. In Jungian terms, he stands for the introspective type. Saturnian types need to make sure they find time for some social relaxation to balance out such a serious influence. More active, outgoing types come under

Mars, and probably have to make a deliberate effort to factor in some quiet, Saturnian time so that they achieve a balance of influences. Those who are devoted to the sociable pleasures of Venus could benefit from some influence of – for example – Mercury, to help keep their minds sharp.

You'll probably find it quite easy to identify yourself as one or other of these types and make the requisite adjustments to how you spend your time. We'll go more deeply into the matter of balancing and blending planetary influences later, when we look at some simple planetary ritual magic. However, for now let's concentrate on bringing the Three Graces into your life.



The Three Graces

- Settle yourself comfortably in your quiet place. Sit quietly, relax, and empty your mind of daily concerns. When you're ready, begin by conjuring up a vivid sense of the Three Graces, much as you did with your daimon. First find an image of the Graces that attracts you. If you don't have any art books to hand, make a search of the internet.
- Gaze at your image and reflect on its beauty. Run over in your mind the various meanings the Graces can hold. Let your eye move from one Grace to another while you think of these meanings, so that you can see how the energy links up and transforms as it passes from Grace to Grace.
- Think of how complete this image is. Each Grace needs the two others for balance, and that is also true of the energies they represent. Appreciate that each one holds an essential place in the trinity, and realize that the same must be true in your own life.
- Look within now and pinpoint where your Grace activity is weakest. You might, for example, be good at giving but not receiving; or you may be so attracted to power that you find little time for pleasure. Make a vow to the neglected Grace that you will honour her properly from

now on.

In order to balance our lives, we should start with a simple ground rule. As we'll see in the next chapter, the ancient wisdom identifies three beneficent planets as the Graces: the Sun, Jupiter and Venus. Hence we should try to organize our lives so as to receive benefits from all these planets through the kinds of people, activities, animals, herbs and precious stones that they rule. We'll look at an easy form of magic for doing just this very soon.

For now, it's up to you to find out what works best for your particular needs and talents. You simply use your intuition, follow your heart, and experiment a bit. Once you've found the right kind of place in which to live and begun to spend time on pursuits that are truly fulfilling, your level of happiness will inevitably begin to rise. Things go with a better flow when you're engaged in enjoyable work – and when you do hit problems, you're more motivated to find solutions. And remember that we each need to find the rhythm of work, quiet time and social relaxation that suits our physical and emotional makeup.

Once your own needs are cared for sufficiently, you'll feel strong and emotionally well balanced. That means you'll be much better able than formerly to offer others the most positive and effective support whenever they might need it. So you can see that it's not selfish to try to find your happiness – in fact, you need to do so in order to fulfil your destiny properly. The ancient wisdom tells us that we each have our place in the cosmic harmony, and that's a truth that can infuse meaning into your life in the most inspiring way.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Four

List habits you would like to change. Set them down in order of difficulty, starting with the easiest. Resolve that you'll tackle them one by one, using the techniques you've learned in this chapter.

Reflect on how your daimon has helped you. You might note meaningful coincidences, lucky breaks in your career or other instances of good fortune. How will becoming more aware of your daimon improve your life?

Analyse a couple of work relationships. If you're not happy with

them, how could you improve them?

What would your ideal home be like? Jot down a short description. Now take each point and make some notes on how you might achieve something close to your ideal.

Contemplate the balance of your life. Note the amount of time you spend daily on working, relaxing, nourishing your soul. Where would you like to make changes, and how can you set about doing so?

5 *Living in Magical Harmony*

By now you've got quite a range of skills to practise for increasing your happiness. If you follow the ancient teachings – either wholly or even just in part – you will find yourself enjoying life much more than formerly; it will make better sense and be more satisfying. But now it's time to go deeper.

Cosmic magic

The wisdom tradition has given you ideas for ordering your routine, behaving well, finding the right place to live and the sort of work you should be doing, and approaching all your relationships from a positive point of view. That means you've made enough progress along the path to begin exploring more magical ways of uncovering a profound, lasting and authentic happiness. In the previous chapter you began to consider your part in the cosmic harmony; now we're going to look more closely at that idea.

The essence of the wisdom tradition is that life is about participating in the flow of universal energies, adding your own particular note to the cosmic harmony. To do this, you need to see the world from the perspective of wonder, miracle and magic.

So far our concerns have been pretty straightforward, and the wisdom teachings have been easy to adapt to modern ways of living. But in this chapter, we'll start looking a little more deeply into esoteric wisdom. That means getting involved with some simple astrology and basic magical practices that can enrich your life and open your awareness to the beneficial energies of the cosmos.

Just as the ancient wisdom's advice has proved to be valuable once translated into contemporary terms, so it is with magic and astrology. The understanding enshrined in these subjects deals with concepts that are familiar to us through modern psychological theories. The word 'psychology' itself translates as 'the wisdom of the soul', and that is a subject in which the ancient tradition is deeply versed.

Before we start looking at talismans and planetary rituals, it

will be helpful to remind ourselves of the way the ancient wisdom teachers understood the universe and the way it works. We might expect such ideas to be outdated, but in fact the ancient wisdom's view is very relevant to our current pressing concerns about the fate of our planet. More than that, it helps to guide us on our way towards achieving a deeper happiness. We've looked briefly at some of this material before, but because it's unfamiliar, a fuller explanation will be useful.

The ancient cosmos is a holy place in which the Divine Power ordains all natural processes. The Earth holds the key central position. The sun, moon, planets and stars revolve around it in crystal spheres, guided by angels, their movement making a celestial, ringing harmony. The moon's sphere is closest to the earth and marks a kind of barrier above which everything is spiritual and eternal; below we are in the realm of dense matter, where everything is changeable and uncertain. Matter is made up of four elements: earth, air, fire and water, which constantly combine and separate in various proportions.

Beyond the sphere of the fixed stars lies heaven, the abode of the Divine Power. Down from heaven rains a constant flood of divine energy, animating the entire cosmos. As this energy passes through each sphere, it takes on the various characteristics of the planets. The energy is pure and strong when it issues from heaven, but when it reaches Earth, it's weakened by having to enter into matter.

In order to get the right approach to using magic in your life, you need to remember two things about the cosmos. One is that it is alive – it's an infinitely huge, animated being. The presence of life was once thought to be shown by movement, which is caused by the soul (*anima* in Latin, from which we get the word 'animate'). You only have to look around at nature and the heavens to see that the universe and the earth within it are moving. So logically, both cosmos and Earth are alive. If you accept that the cosmos is a living being, you realize that every part of it relates to and affects every other part: just like your own body, it's a coherent whole. Hence nothing can be changed without there being consequences.

That's the first point to remember: that the cosmos is alive and ensouled. The second point follows from the first. Everything in

the cosmos, including us, receives the divine energy that constantly pours out from heaven, giving life to and sustaining the entire universe. The soul of each entity passes it on to the physical body through the medium of the spirit. This happens naturally, just as we receive the warmth and light of the sun without even thinking about it.

Here is where magic enters the picture. As the divine energy floods down from heaven, it passes through the planetary spheres. Let's say that some divine rays pass through the sphere of Mercury. They become imbued with the properties of Mercury such as intelligence and swift movement. These rays descend to Earth, there to rain upon all and sundry. Whatever on Earth is most attuned to Mercury by nature will be particularly receptive to these rays.

The wisdom tradition uses a whole system of planetary affinities, including metals and precious stones, plants, animals and humans. For example, gold is thought to contain the power of the Sun because of its colour and precious nature. Solar animals include the lion, with its golden sunburst of mane, and the cockerel, which crows to greet the sunrise. Solar people are those born under the influence of Leo, the sign ruled by the Sun.

Now, if you are a magician you can utilize this knowledge to manipulate the divine rays to your benefit. Say you want to absorb the power of the Sun. You can choose a time when the Sun is astrologically powerful for performing a ritual using various solar items. For instance, you could burn a solar spice such as frankincense and sing a hymn to the Sun while engraving an emblem of a lion on a gold ring. Such a ritual concentrates the power of the Sun by utilizing a variety of things that are particularly receptive to the solar energy. Magical rituals work by focusing energies that are naturally present in the world around us.

Magic is an effective way you can find your place in the cosmic order. It enables you to tap into the cosmic energy and open up a pathway to higher realms of being. It's just a matter of looking around and seeing which stone, plant or animal belongs to which planetary god. Then all you have to do is apply a little art to nature. As we've seen, spells and rituals involve mixing together substances belonging to some particular god, in order to

concentrate the divine essence. But the essence of magic lies not so much in changing the world around you as in changing yourself.

The true magic is what happens to your consciousness when you concentrate cosmic energies in this way. It's a powerful method for becoming aware of the invisible energies that surround us all the time, every day, wherever we are – and of participating in them. You've already learned how to identify your daimon so that you may do the work the cosmos requires of you. Magic is a way of further refining that consciousness of being in touch with higher powers. With a little practice, you can learn to participate more fully in the universal harmony, tuning into the planetary energies and using them to bring greater fulfilment into your life.

Of course, you may not aspire to absorb yourself in divine cosmic forces, but you don't necessarily have to look at magic in that way, unless it appeals to you. What's good about this magic is that it works on so many levels. Simply because it's based on the underlying cosmic principle of harmony, it will help you to feel happier in daily life, quite apart from introducing you in an easy way to a spiritual technique that can be developed to a considerable degree.

You're going to be learning about a simple version of this powerful magic, so that it's not only accessible but also safe for you to practise. But what even this simple magic will do is quietly set your feet on the path towards union with the divine forces of the cosmos. However, there's no pressure – you can take one step at a time and go just as far as you wish.

This magic deriving from the wisdom teachings can easily be read as psychological, aimed as it is at improving mood and health by bringing you into a state of physical wellbeing and emotional balance. It can help you to acknowledge and express every positive aspect of your being. You can, if you wish, approach the gods, daimons and angels who throng the magical universe by thinking of them as symbols, understanding them as latent powers in your own personality that the magic stirs into action. You are free to see the magic as a way of getting in touch with your own inherent energies, rather than opening yourself up to divine forces from heaven. It's entirely up to you.

Absorbing cosmic energy

The theories and rituals of the ancient magic celebrate the miraculous and awe-inspiring nature of the universe. It's a way of understanding the world not by quantifying facts but by entering into a vivid relationship with its wonders. The wisdom tradition teaches us that using magic is simply making the most of the divine nature of existence. Magic requires some knowledge of astrology, but it doesn't have to be complicated. It's a part of life itself, and anybody may have occult experiences. We all recognize meaningful coincidences and undergo inexplicable events from time to time – those aspects of life are simply part of what it means to be human. While such things just happen out of the blue, by learning a little magic you will be able to take charge and create moods and experiences as and when you feel they are right for you.

The ancient cosmos is a gloriously rich place, peopled by spirits and angels on all levels. Whether or not we are aware of them they are there, going about their business, and the same goes for the divine energy pouring down from heaven. We benefit from both angelic activity and the divine energy, and the practice of magic is simply a way of participating consciously in a process that's already happening. You've made a good start already by getting in touch with your daimon. Magic enables us to manipulate or concentrate the divine power so that we get the most possible good out of it. When used for the right purpose, it's no more unnatural than practising agriculture to help plants grow their best.



Cosmic energy

- At this point, it might help to do a little meditation on the concepts outlined above. That way, you'll internalize just how it feels to be part of a magical cosmos.
- Sit in your quiet place and calm your thoughts. Now focus not on thinking but on feeling the energies of life. Begin with yourself: become aware of the life in your body.

Sense the blood flowing, the rhythm of your breath, the warmth of your skin. Usually these are things you simply take for granted, but now you'll begin to feel the incredible and mysterious vitality that animates you.

- When you're ready, turn your attention outwards. Sense the life in whatever there is around you – there may be pot plants, flowers or a pet in the room, or perhaps a tree outside the window. If there's nothing alive nearby, then send your thoughts out further. Realize that these living beings are also sustained by cosmic energy: life pulses through them all.
- Now for something more challenging. Try to be aware of the energy in the inanimate objects around you. Everything – furniture, electrical items, ornaments – originated one way or another in the Earth. No matter how elaborate the process of manufacture, each object in your room and outside has been made from materials that were once natural. All these items will eventually decay and return to the Earth; there's a slow and endless cycle of energy going on here.
- Become aware that the air, too, carries life. It moves, it changes, its presence makes your own life possible. Remember the esoteric principle that love sustains the cosmos in harmony. Open up all your senses and your intuition until you can truly feel the life and love flowing through and around you.
- This meditation can feel very comforting, as you begin to realize the benevolent and all-encompassing nature of the sustaining cosmic energy.

Now you should be ready to start practising some magic, beginning on the simplest level. Your first step is learning to ingest the very spirit of the cosmos so that you come into a deeper harmony with it. Recall to mind that you are made up of body and soul, with spirit as a mediating substance that spreads the power of the soul throughout your body. And the same is true of the universe – it has a physical being and an indwelling soul,

which is spread throughout the entire cosmos by the universal spirit that infuses everything, everywhere, to a greater or lesser extent. According to the ancient wisdom, some substances are particularly in tune with the cosmic soul. Thus they absorb a concentration of spirit, which is known as the quintessence. If you use these quintessential substances, you can absorb the life of the cosmos in just the same way that your body absorbs the goodness of food.

What are these quintessential substances? The wisdom teachings state that we can often tell them by their effect on us, for our own human spirit is naturally attracted to those things that contain a concentration of quintessence: they please our senses and make us feel good. Sweet-smelling, shining or otherwise attractive things are quintessential. The ancient wisdom lists good wine, white sugar, balsam, gold, precious stones, cinnamon, roses and myrobalans (an Indian fruit believed to have amazing medicinal properties).

Although you might baulk slightly at finding cosmic virtue in sugar, you should remember that before the development of industrialized manufacture, refined sugar was a novel luxury available only to the rich; nobody was in a position to over-indulge in it. Remember too that these things are naturally powerful, and therefore you don't need much of them in order to enjoy the benefit: their essence is concentrated. A little wine, the smell of roses, a cinnamon-flavoured cake – these will all help strengthen your spirit. If you can't afford gold or jewels, you might try taking the homeopathic remedy aurum, which is based on gold. But of course, if you do that, it's best to consult a homeopath first.

You've probably noticed that these quintessential substances have strong suggestions of pleasure and luxury. The magical cosmos is a place in which delight reflects the benign nature of divinity – after all, the energy keeping the universe in harmony is love itself. If you make use of the quintessence, then, it's important to do so in the right frame of mind, and that means remembering the divine origin of these brilliant, tasty or intoxicating items. Try to be aware while you are enjoying them that wine and roses are gifts from the Divine Power. You may be surprised at how intensely your pleasure is enhanced. That's

because by focusing on your experience, you are fully waking up to it.

We are used to consuming as a way of life – taking in not only food and drink but experience too, often with an almost manic urge to fit as much as possible into our lives. But more does not equal better. We tend to rush rather than savour experience, doing one thing while thinking of the next, only partly aware of what our senses are telling us. To absorb the cosmic spirit we need to slow down, pay attention and be present in the moment. Then a rose can seem miraculous and a sip of wine like nectar.

Harmonizing the inner universe

Learning to experience and absorb the quintessence is a good place to start in your exploration of the magical world. The next step takes us back to the start of this book, for we should bear in mind also that according to the wisdom teachings, most of us come under the heading of scholars. As we've discussed, the way we live requires us to live in a largely sedentary way, spending much of our time thinking, talking and writing rather than making a living by physical activity. There are particular ways of harmonizing ourselves with the cosmos that take this into account.

Those of us who work with our brains more than with our bodies come under the special guardianship of Apollo, the god associated with the Sun. He is the leader of the nine Muses, who in myth are responsible for all the major arts and sciences: all forms of learning, in fact. According to the ancient wisdom, all your mental activity exhausts the spirit, so that it needs even more nourishment than the body. Hence, your food, drink and medicine should be attuned to your subtle spiritual needs as well as providing goodness for your physical envelope. What's more, this spiritual nourishment should be under Apollo's rulership, since that will strengthen you more than anything else.

The wisdom tradition particularly recommends two Apollonian remedies: music and light. If we translate this into psychological terms, it makes sense. Your daily work is likely to be mentally quite demanding, draining your inner resources as you pour energy into organizing, planning and communicating. And you're probably almost always working indoors, away from natural light

and air. Honouring Apollo can be as simple as making sure you get out at lunchtime to feel the air on your skin. Walking or sitting in natural light can be very refreshing, as can relaxing with music in the evenings. The ancient teachings advise us to get as much daylight as possible, enjoy the sunshine (though not to excess) and when darkness falls, cheer ourselves with firelight, candlelight and music. Honouring Apollo means sleeping with a window open, too!

It's all a question of balancing the different aspects of your life, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter. You already know that work is Saturnian: Apollonian light and pleasure can help to balance the dutiful, plodding energy of Saturn. It's vital to find time for Apollo in your working life, and you'll feel the benefit when you do so. Music and light are nourishment for the spirit, as is warmth in the chill of the evening.

Along with Apollo's nourishing gifts of light and music, we find listed an item that belongs to another familiar god, Bacchus: wine and its odour. Since we're aiming at harmony, Apollo's power needs tempering by its opposite, and the light and heat of his remedies is balanced by the cool, relaxing liquids of the wine god. Taken together, these four remedies represent the four elements. Light stands for fire, music for air, wine for the element earth and its scent for water. What the wisdom teaching is doing here is showing you how to nourish your spirit. Just as the body is fed with foods, the spirit requires balanced refreshment too. Song, light, and wine and its odour are all as subtle as spirit itself and can work directly on it. Taken in equal parts, they will harmonize your spiritual being, refreshing and renewing your subtle energies.

Bringing music and light into your life is simple enough, but it will pay to think a little more about wine. After all, alcohol is powerful stuff that can easily be abused. The ancient wisdom's advice on drinking is extremely sound: you are recommended to take wine cautiously so as not to get sweaty or dehydrated, and certainly not to become drunk. Any of these states indicates that, far from increasing the harmony of your spirit, you are actually creating an imbalance – and that is the exact opposite of what you are intending.

In this context it's relevant to note that almost more important

than actually drinking wine is enjoying its odour. According to the wisdom tradition, that's the most spiritual part of wine, since scent has no physical body. So it's suggested that you drink a little wine twice daily, and more frequently refresh the spirit by merely rinsing your mouth with wine, washing your hands in it or applying it to your nostrils and temples.

Wine, of course, was a daily drink in ancient times, rather than being something of an indulgence as in ours. You might not be inclined to treat it so casually, and you're likely to think twice before rinsing and spitting out wine – or indeed using it to wash! But it's true that a little wine applied as the wisdom recommends is surprisingly uplifting. For example, you could follow the instructions when you arrive home from work. You will find that the spirit of wine acts as an effective pick-me-up. Or you can choose to invoke both Apollo and Bacchus by settling down with a glass of wine to listen to music by candlelight.



Absorbing the quintessence

- Although you can integrate the use of quintessential substances into your daily life, it can be very helpful to your magical experience to make a simple ritual out of applying them. This will enhance your experience and intensify it, allowing you to appreciate fully the energies you're absorbing.
- Decide what items you're going to use. Choose substances that will appeal to two or three senses, such as a piece of jewellery that will sparkle in the light, a spiced cake to eat and a favourite piece of soothing music. If you need light, use candles rather than electric light. You will need one ritual candle as well.
- Assemble all your items somewhere you won't be disturbed. Calm and concentrate your thoughts on what you're doing. Feel the life within you and all around. Focus your thought on nourishing and strengthening your spirit.

- Take your time over this very simple ritual. You should be fully aware of all your movements and everything you're doing. First, light the candle. Appreciate the beauty of its light. Then start playing your music. Absorb your attention in it. Do you see a relationship between the candlelight and the music, almost as if the flame is swaying in time to the rhythm? Next, look at your piece of jewellery in the candlelight. See how intensely the flickering light brings out its brilliance. Put it on, and be aware of how it feels against your skin. Finally, eat your cake – slowly, relishing every mouthful.
- When you've finished the cake, sit quietly for a while. Concentrate on just being conscious of your spirit absorbing the quintessence from the various sources you've used. After a little practice, you should be able to feel an inner harmony and strength steadily growing.
- Finish the ritual when you're ready by turning off the music at the end of a piece and snuffing out the candle (don't blow it out). By now you should be feeling much calmer and more centred than when you started. Take this serenity back into your daily existence; don't just let it go but try to stay aware of it for as long as possible.

Drawing down the planets

We can all benefit from absorbing some quintessential substances and applying the balancing powers of Apollo and Bacchus to our lives. However, there is much more you can do to harmonize your life with that of the cosmos. Let's look now at invoking the planetary powers and making magical talismans to attune yourself to the celestial energies. Ideally you need some astrological knowledge for these activities, but it's surprising how effective the rituals can be even if you are working with only a little basic understanding. We'll look at what you need to know as we go along.

All human beings have so much in common that you can use these shared characteristics to tune into the appropriate planets, even without knowing details of your individual horoscope. After

all, we're all members of the human race; we share the same physical needs and – as His Holiness the Dalai Lama so often says – we all want to be happy. If we translate our basic nature into astrological terms, we can then see to which planets all people have an affinity.

The ancient wisdom names three planets that define human nature: the Sun, Jupiter and Mercury. The Sun rules over some noble qualities of character such as truthfulness and honour. According to the wisdom, it also gives us our erect physical stature and a certain clarity of spirit. These somewhat abstract characteristics are joined by Jupiterian qualities. Jupiter is a temperate, beneficent planet. We know that in traditional medical terms, our bodies too should be temperate: neither too hot nor too cold, too dry nor too wet. Physically, as in all else, we are most comfortable when those four elements are in balance. Achieving that balance is Jupiter's function. And Jupiter rules the ninth month, when we are born, just as he rules the ninth zodiac sign of Sagittarius. Mercury contributes our intelligence, the quickness of thought and inventiveness that lies behind all developments in civilization.

If, therefore, you make use of foods and medicines belonging to these planets, if you wear their jewels, listen to appropriate music and associate with suitable people, you will be able to develop in yourself all the gifts of spirit, balance and intelligence the planets can give. You will be fulfilling your true nature; developing to the full your human potential, in fact. So what does the wisdom recommend?

To strengthen the link between yourself and solar energy, you can eat golden honey, burn frankincense, and wear amber or gold jewellery. Solar people are blond, curly-haired and kind, while solar animals include the swan and the lion. Jupiter is powerfully present in topaz and sapphire, wine and sugar, the peacock, the eagle and people who are handsome, respectable and generous. To align yourself with Mercury, you can wear silver marcasite or agate; keep animals such as monkeys or dogs and befriend people who are eloquent, versatile and sharp-witted.

Such are the basic instructions, but you can play around with these ideas a little as your particular needs change. The wisdom magic requires you to get into the habit of introspection, so that

day by day you are aware of what planetary energies will help you to improve your mood and succeed in practical tasks. For instance, Mercury is a suitable planetary god to invoke for help with a job interview, where you have to think quickly and creatively. Low energy or sadness can be lifted by judicious application of solar and Jupiterian remedies, for the Sun gives light and Jupiter optimism. Your contact with the planets can be as simple as eating a spoonful of honey, or you can create elaborate rituals – we'll look at doing so shortly.

Whichever approach you take, you'll find that thinking in terms of planetary energies will make you increasingly sensitive to how they manifest in your life. This habit of magical awareness very quickly becomes second nature, especially as your knowledge of the various planetary rulerships broadens and deepens. That in turn will enable you to recognize at any given moment what you need in order to live a happy and harmonious life. Since the world and our lives are in constant flux, this is a continual process, reflecting the ceaseless dance of the planets in their orbits.

You should work with the seven celestial bodies known for most of human history: the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. As we're using the traditional wisdom system, we'll stick to describing those planets rather than adding on the three outer ones (Uranus, Neptune and Pluto) that are beyond the range of the naked eye. The ancient system is, in fact, complete, so we aren't in any way missing out.

You already know that the three planets you are most attuned to as a human being are the Sun, Mercury and Jupiter, but each of the other planets can also help with various aspects of your life. You have already learnt that you can invoke Mercury for help in situations where you need your wits about you. In addition to that, any pursuit requiring skill or the use of words falls under Mercury's rule. You can begin your exploration of the planets with a simple table:

Planet	Area of Life
Sun	Pursuit of power and respect, promotion and prominence
Moon	Your instinctual self; caring for

	self and others; comfort
Mercury	Quick thinking; talking and writing; persuasion
Venus	Pleasure; parties; love and friendship; beauty
Mars	Competition; sports; self-assertion
Jupiter	Travel; philosophy; religion; law; civic matters
Saturn	Hard and productive work; solitude; esoteric studies

These planetary gods cover every aspect of human existence, so you have here the makings of a complete system for harmonizing your life with the cosmic energies. The wisdom teachings list various substances belonging to each planet so that you can begin to see how their influence might be enhanced – or indeed counteracted if necessary. We've already looked briefly at substances belonging to the Sun, Mercury and Jupiter; here is a table that includes suggestions for the other planets:

Planet	Magical rulerships
Sun	Gold, amber; honey, frankincense; swans
Moon	Pearls and crystal; whiteness; moisture
Mercury	Marcasite, agate; monkeys, dogs; quicksilver
Venus	Turtle doves and pigeons; lapis lazuli, sapphire; roses
Mars	Brass, iron, bloodstone; sulphur; fire; red; heat
Jupiter	Turquoise, amethyst; wine; sugar; peacocks
Saturn	Lead; jet jewellery, garnets; greyness; heaviness

You should be a little cautious when invoking either Mars or Saturn, for they are known in traditional astrology as malefic, or unfriendly, planets. Mars of course is the god of war, and he is

associated with conflict of all kinds. We've already seen some of the downside of Saturn, who also rules old age, sickness and poverty. But nothing in a cosmos that's created and sustained by love can be all bad. Hence, Mars is necessary for effective action, and Saturn for stability and perseverance. Therefore there will be times when, like a doctor using judicious amounts of a medicine that could be dangerous in large doses, you need to use their remedies.

Once you've grasped the simple tables above, you can take a look at the table of planetary rulerships below, which includes other areas such as days of the week and countries. Later, you can expand your knowledge of planetary rulerships by reading about traditional astrology in books and on the internet. When you do so, bear in mind that some items can appear under more than one planet, for the ancient magic is a complex matter and one substance can have a variety of qualities relating to different planets. But very quickly you will begin to learn what each substance means to you, and how to use it; just follow your intuition.

Table of Planetary Rulerships			
Below are listed some of the linked chains of items belonging to each planet. These lists are by no means comprehensive, but they represent a useful starting point from which you can explore further.			

Rulership	Sun	Moon	Mercury
Aspect of life	Fame, honour, power	Home, domestic life, comfort	Talking, writing, thinking
Metal	Gold	Silver	Quicksilver
Jewel	Diamond, ruby, carbuncle	Crystal, pearl, opal, moonstone	Marcasite, lodestone
Colour	Orange, deep yellow	Silver, pearl, silvery blue	Changeable colours
Herb	Camomile, celery, juniper	Clary sage, white willow	Caraway, dill, fennel, lavender
Animal	Lions, swans, cockerels	Owls, hares	Dogs, monkeys
People	Tall, blond,	Mothers, round-	Witty, versatile,

	authoritative	faced, neighbours	quickmoving, children
Music	Reverential, simple, earnest	Gentle, dreamy	Cheerful, vigorous, complex
Career	Politician, PR officer	Chef, gardener	Writer, journalist
Weekday	Sunday	Monday	Wednesday
Country	Italy, France	Scotland, New Zealand	USA, Belgium

Rulership	Venus	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn
Aspect of life	Love, friendship, beauty	Competition, conflict, energy	Travel, protection, conviviality	Work, discipline, occult study
Metal	Copper	Iron	Tin	Lead
Jewel	Emerald, sapphire	Bloodstone, flint, malachite	Amethyst, turquoise	Garnet, jet
Colour	Green	Red	Purple	Black, grey
Herb	Peppermint, rose, thyme	Aloe, basil, pepper, pine	Jasmine, sage, borage	Comfrey, shepherd's purse, mullein
Animal	Doves, pets	Birds of prey, scorpions	Horses, peacocks	Camels, goats
People	Attractive, affectionate	Red-haired, decisive	Weighty, sociable, humorous	Fathers, elderly, serious
Music	Voluptuous, soft	Quick, sharp, fierce	Earnest, sweet, joyful, steady	Slow, deep, plaintive
Career	Beauty therapist, artist	Sportsperson, soldier	Lawyer, teacher	Historian, financier
Weekday	Friday	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
Country	Ireland, Poland	England, Japan	Spain, Australia	Greece, Mexico

There are various levels at which you can work with the planetary energies. The simplest is to identify your current need and address it on the spot. That can be as straightforward as warming and cheering yourself on a depressing, chilly day by a solar drink of honey and ginger, or wearing mercurial marcasite to that crucial job interview. Or you can offset the potentially draining effects of a period of serious Saturnian work by wearing something white, as the Pythagoreans used to do.

Try to get into the habit of seeing the world through planetary symbolism. Once you start adopting the outlook of the wisdom teachings, you'll realize that everything you see, touch, hear, taste, smell or even think can be related to one planet or another. Just look around you. You may be sitting at a desk – the pens and pencils belong to Mercury, while the desk itself is a solid construction with Saturnian qualities. You may have brightened up the room with plants, pictures or other decorative touches – that's Venus making your surroundings pleasurable. A cushion on your chair for comfort? That's the Moon. And so on. Once you begin to bring this symbolic mode of thought into your everyday reality, you can put the knowledge to use.

Imagine you're in a foul mood. You might be depressed under Saturn, or angry under Mars. Now, we've looked at the way the outer world reflects our moods, so you already know that you're going to notice everything that reflects your bad temper. Say the sky is covered with heavy clouds, and it looks like rain – you feel the universe is picking on you, but really it's just that you're attuned to negative Saturnian energy. Or people keep on wandering into your path, getting in your way and holding you up. Your anger increases; Mars gets a tighter grip on you.

In either case, you're going to end up feeling worse and worse, but if you stop a moment and look around for symbols of the other planets, that can really help to get you out of the rut of your thoughts. Perhaps there are trees in sight, or a flower garden, and you can focus on enjoying the soothing greenery and flowers. Or a cheerful friend makes a joke and instead of shrugging it off, you admit it's funny and allow yourself to laugh. You're noticing Venus and Jupiter in the environment, and they'll help you shift into a better, more positive mood. Once you've established yourself there, you'll be more emotionally balanced,

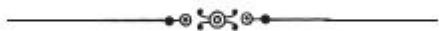
able to see things more clearly and deal with whatever depressed you or made you angry in the first place. The essential point is that you should make a conscious effort to recognize the planets and how their energies can help you.

This is all simple stuff that you can apply to everyday circumstances, but you can also enter further into the realms of magic to find even more effective ways of absorbing cosmic power. This means fine-tuning the process with the aim of getting stronger results. Making a planetary talisman can be extremely effective as a way of tuning into a particular energy.

You can make a simple talisman as follows. All you need is the correct gem or metal for a particular planet: that's sufficient if you're in a hurry. For example, a gold pendant hung from either a yellow silk thread or a gold chain is perfectly adequate for attracting solar energy. Ideally, you will first acquire or put on this pendant when the Sun is in a powerful position in the heavens. Such a time would be during the four weeks from late March to late April when the Sun is in Aries, or late July to late August when it's in Leo. But if you don't want to wait, you can choose the right day of the week, which for the Sun is (of course) Sunday. Midday is the best time, when the Sun is high in the sky.

The basic image that the wisdom tradition recommends for talismans is that of the cross. This image is so old that the ancient Egyptians used it in the form of the ankh. It's a symbol of life and, as such, considered to have protective powers. The wisdom teachings suggest that the cross draws its energy from the divine powers of the planets and stars. In other words, it's a cosmic image that attracts spiritual power from the entire universe. So this image is a good starting point for general protective purposes; it's even promised that it can help keep you healthy.


















You might also want to put some personal effort into making a more individualized talisman, in which case it's helpful to ritualize your actions.



Making a talisman



- A good place to start is by making a talisman that relates to your *daimon*. That will help to strengthen the core of your being. You've already learned how to find your daimon, so the first step is to find an appropriate material for making the talisman. The classical approach is to choose the correct gem and engrave a planetary symbol on it, but that is likely to prove difficult for most of us! So a good alternative is to buy a locket to contain a planetary substance. That can be a herb, a feather or perhaps a piece of paper on which you've drawn a symbol in the right planetary colour. The traditional planetary symbols and zodiac signs are set out below.

Symbols of Traditional Planets and Zodiac Signs	
Planets	
	Sun
	Moon
	Mercury
	Venus
	Mars
	Jupiter
	Saturn
Zodiac signs	
	Aries – ruled by Mars
	Taurus – ruled by Venus
	Gemini – ruled by Mercury
	Cancer – ruled by the Moon
	Leo – ruled by the Sun
	Virgo – ruled by Mercury
	Libra – ruled by Venus
	Scorpio – ruled by Mars
	Sagittarius – ruled by Jupiter
	Capricorn – ruled by Saturn
	Aquarius – ruled by Saturn
	Pisces – ruled by Jupiter

- The locket should be gold, so that along with your planetary energy you also absorb some solar energy, which will also warm and strengthen the planet you're

invoking. Of course, if you are invoking the Sun, that simplifies matters. If you're in a hurry for your talisman and don't have time to get hold of a gold locket, find a piece of cloth in the right planetary colour in which to wrap your herb or symbol. You can hang this round your neck with yellow thread.

- Once you've got your locket and its contents, you will need to choose an appropriate time for making the talisman. Here is where some astrological knowledge can come in helpful. That's because according to astrology, each planet waxes and wanes in power during the course of 24 hours. What's more, it's affected by complicated factors such as the zodiac sign it's in and its relationship to other planets along the zodiac. There are quite complex rules for this, but we'll keep it simple. Just use the table of planetary rulerships [here](#) to find the correct day of the week for your planetary *daimon*.
- If you wish to add more power to your ritual, you can also choose to perform it at the relevant planetary hour. This gives your actions a double dose of concentrated energy. Look at the following pages for an explanation of how to work out planetary hours. It's simpler than it looks, as you can get the calculations done automatically online.

How to use planetary hours

Planetary hours aren't the same as the 60-minute hours to which we're accustomed. They're calculated by dividing the periods from sunrise to sunset and from sunset to sunrise into 12 equal periods each. Then each segment is assigned to a planet, using the following order: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and Moon. The first hour of each day is given to the planet ruling that day – so, the Sun for Sunday, Moon for Monday, Mars for Tuesday, Mercury for Wednesday, Jupiter for Thursday, Venus for Friday and Saturn for Saturday.

Let's look at a midwinter Saturday, when the sun rises at 8:02 a.m. and sets at 3:52 p.m.. The period between these hours is divided up into 12 equal sections. The first hour is ruled by Saturn, the planet to which Saturday belongs. The other planets

follow in descending order: Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and Moon; then the sequence repeats until the hour of sunset.

Planetary Hours (Daylight)			
Hour	Start Time	End Time	Ruler of Hour
1.	08:02	08:40	Saturn
2.	08:41	09:19	Jupiter
3.	09:20	09:58	Mars
4.	09:59	10:37	Sun
5.	10:38	11:16	Venus
6.	11:17	11:56	Mercury
7.	11:57	12:35	Moon
8.	12:36	13:14	Saturn
9.	13:15	13:53	Jupiter
10.	13:54	14:32	Mars
11.	14:33	15:12	Sun
12.	15:13	15:51	Venus

Now the 12 night-time hours follow on in the sequence, repeating until sunrise at 8:02 a.m. the following day.

Planetary Hours (Nighttime)			
13.	15:52	17:12	Mercury
14.	17:13	18:33	Moon
15.	18:34	19:53	Saturn
16.	19:54	21:14	Jupiter
17.	21:15	22:35	Mars
18.	22:36	23:56	Sun
19.	23:57	01:17	Venus
20.	01:18	02:38	Mercury
21.	02:39	03:59	Moon
22.	04:00	05:19	Saturn

23.	05:20	06:40	Jupiter
24.	06:41	08:01	Mars

So, for example, if you are invoking the Sun that day, you have three choices for good times to perform your ritual: between 9:59 and 10:37 in the morning; 2:33 and 3:12 in the afternoon; or 10:36 and 11:56 in the evening.

All these figures are bound to look a bit complicated at first, so it's a good idea to go online and look up a planetary hours calculator, then try it a few times for different dates so that you can familiarize yourself with how it looks. All you need to do is enter the date you want, and the place where you are (or the nearest large town). Everything else is done for you! Once you feel confident, then you are ready to start using this useful tool for magical purposes.

There are several websites where you can get the calculations done. This site is a good one: <http://www.astrology.com.tr/planetary-hours.asp>

- So, at a suitable time you will go to your quiet place with your talisman materials. Make sure nobody will interrupt you: it's important that you're able to relax and concentrate. Set up a ritual area for making your talisman – either a table covered with a cloth of the right colour, or a large cushion on the floor.
- Begin by calming your thoughts. Light a candle. Now hold all the items for making your talisman in your cupped hands and focus your thoughts intensely on the planet whose energy you want to draw into the talisman. Once you've made a connection with your *daimon*, offer a prayer for help and protection, or whichever qualities you wish to develop in yourself. Then assemble the materials. That can be as simple as placing a piece of herb in the locket, or making a drawing as mentioned above. Keep your thoughts focused all the time you're working, so that the connection with your *daimon* stays open.

- Finally, pass the completed talisman through the candle flame to purify it (if it's flammable, just waft it past). Then put it on.

You can wear this talisman all the time, or just when you feel you need a boost of energy and some support from your *daimon*. It's a way of reminding yourself that you're part of the cosmic order, and of keeping the communication channel open so that there will be energy available to you whenever you need it.

Just a reminder – you can believe this either literally or symbolically. The choice is yours. Either way, what you are doing is focusing on particular qualities that will be helpful to you, and hence strengthening your own ability to receive or develop them.

Planetary rituals

What you're doing here is learning to invoke particular planets, and there may be times when you feel that wearing a talisman isn't quite enough. Say, for example, you are going on a long journey. You may wish to attract some of Jupiter's protective energy, and for that it can be useful to perform a ritual invocation.

The rules for rituals are similar to those for making a talisman. First of all, it's vital to pick the right time to perform a ritual. You already know how to do this. You can be flexible with the form of your ritual, but there are certain elements that may prove helpful. First you need to look at the list of the various substances your planet rules, and choose from it what you can easily obtain and use.



Planetary ritual

- Let's say you're invoking Jupiter. The colour most associated with Jupiter is purple, so you might begin by setting up an altar or sacred area by covering it with a purple cloth. Suitable flowers can be placed there, such as lilac or jasmine if it is in season, or any flower of the

appropriate colour.

- Rituals traditionally use incense and light, so you can burn frankincense or storax and light a purple candle. Small bowls of offerings such as sage can be placed on the altar, perhaps a peacock feather or even pictures or models of Jupiterian animals such as a horse. Focus Jupiterian energy on yourself by wearing some purple clothing and turquoise or amethyst jewellery. It's entirely up to you how many of these details you include. You might just use what you have to hand, or make a collection of items to be reserved for rituals.
- You should assemble all the items for your ritual in good time, and then begin as the planetary hour strikes by lighting the candle and incense and playing appropriate music. For invoking Jupiter, choose tunes or songs that are deep-toned, melodic and joyful. Ideally, you should play or sing yourself, but recorded music is also fine. Sit or stand and let yourself become absorbed in the planetary energy. This is not just a passive process; particularly at first, you will need to make a special effort to be alert and aware of the kind of energy you wish to invoke. It might be helpful to repeat a list of the qualities you desire, like a mantra.
- Once you feel properly focused and calm, recite a prayer in Jupiter's honour and make a request for his assistance. For this purpose, the ancient hymns to the Greek gods, supposedly composed by Orpheus and known as the *Orphic Hymns* are ideal. They are available in an English translation by Thomas Taylor, and although his choice of words sometimes reads rather clumsily, the hymns have great power.
- Now you can make your request. Use your own words for this and remember to maintain a respectful attitude. Once your petition is finished, sit quietly and stay focused on the Jupiterian energy. Imagine warmth and light flooding into you; be aware of receiving a boost of beneficent power to achieve your wishes. Remain in this state for as

long as feels comfortable.

- Once your ritual is performed, dismantle the altar – but try to keep an awareness of an open channel between your inner self and the energy you've been invoking.

This form of ritual is only a suggestion, making use of traditional elements of magic. You can experiment as much as you like: it's good to personalize the experience. After all, you want it to be as enjoyable as possible, bringing harmony and delight into your life. The aim is for you to achieve a meditative state in which you can truly open yourself to the helpful planetary energies you require. At first, if you're not used to doing this kind of thing, you may feel hampered by feelings of awkwardness if not downright silliness – after all, what you're doing is so totally at odds with conventional behaviour. But remember that nobody can see you: you're doing this entirely for yourself. After a few tries you'll begin to feel easier, and as that happens, you'll find yourself entering more fully into a receptive state. Then you should really begin to see results.

At first you may notice simply that you feel good after a ritual – more calm, peaceful and confident. What you are doing is softening the shell of the ego, and allowing the possibility of getting help and energy from a spiritual source that's more powerful than your individual, conscious self. To achieve this, of course, an attitude of humility is vital. Whether you imagine the help coming from a higher spiritual source or from deep within yourself is up to you. Whatever you choose to believe, performing a planetary ritual can be an extremely effective way of dissolving the ego's boundaries and letting in power from elsewhere.

Do try to keep in mind that you are performing planetary magic to increase the harmony in your life and for spiritual purposes. Your rituals will work best if you use them not for material gain but to develop your own talents and strengths. Allow the cosmos to bring into your life what you need; focus on opening yourself to accept a higher knowledge rather than trying to force a result that you want. As you get used to performing rituals, you will realize that they bring their own reward, quite apart from what you may be asking for. That is part of the mystery and fascination of following path of the ancient wisdom.

Creating planetary rituals and talismans may be activities that you want to keep private, for fear of being misunderstood. But although what you're doing may seem odd to some people, it is really based on a sound understanding of human psychology. As you continue with this magic, the sense of harmonizing yourself with the cosmos will begin to gain power in your life, so that you increasingly feel instinctually what is right for you to do at any particular time. Life becomes more fulfilling, even when it's difficult. And you are supported all the time by the knowledge that spiritual forces are buoying you up and giving you strength.

Using your horoscope

So far we've been looking at magical activities that need only a little research to be accessible to anybody – but you may want to refine your efforts even further, and for that you need to know your horoscope.

You've already learnt how to identify your planetary *daimon* or angel in your horoscope, but there's a great deal more useful information hidden in your chart. A detailed reading of your horoscope can enable you to identify more precisely what kind of assistance you can reasonably ask from the other planets. For example, we can all invoke Venus for help with romance, but if you know what house Venus occupies in your horoscope and how she is aspected, you'll have a much fuller picture of what you can expect from relationships. For that amount of detail, you'll need to consult a qualified astrologer or learn the subject yourself. Then you will be able to build up quite a complex picture of how you might develop your life in various directions. There are contact details for astrological schools [here](#).

An understanding of your horoscope will also enable you to identify your weak spots and which planetary energies can be most helpful in strengthening them. You'll be able to create rituals that invoke planetary energies in highly specific ways according to their positions in sign and house and their aspects to other planets. And remember, the more fully you're able to understand your needs, talents and desires, the more you'll be able to fulfil them and enjoy an increasingly enriched life.

Living with an enhanced awareness of planetary energies can make a huge difference to your life. You will start to become

truly conscious that you're part of the universe, that everything is enmeshed in a vast, harmonious dance. And this isn't just head knowledge: it becomes an actual, vivid experience.

In this cosmic harmony, we each have our own unique place and purpose. As you begin to open out to a more cosmic view of life, the constraints and worries of life will impinge on you less, and you will begin to find an unshakeable core of inner peace and delight. The wisdom tradition would say that you are finding your true self. You're beginning to move on from a basic existence spent caring for your physical needs, and up to a more spiritualized life that brings you closer to the angels.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Five
<i>Recall the traditional understanding of the cosmos.</i> Describe it as best as you can, referring to pages 143–144 if need be. Think about how it reflects a symbolic reality.
<i>Decide on some ways of absorbing the quintessence.</i> List a few quintessential foods, flowers, scents and so on that you love and make a resolution to treat yourself to these more often.
<i>How are the planets active in your life?</i> Think about which energies you feel attuned to, and which you might lack. Make notes on what you need for invoking the latter from time to time.
<i>How private is your magical universe?</i> Write down the names of those you can confidently talk to about using magic, and how far you would feel comfortable confiding in them.

6 *Seven Steps to Heaven*

We've looked at employing planetary symbolism in the creation of talismans and rituals. Now you're going to amplify your understanding of the planets by a more detailed examination of the place they hold in your daily life.

The ladder of the planets

By now you're familiar with the ancient wisdom's understanding of the cosmic order and the planets' places in it. Although the earth-centred scheme doesn't reflect physical fact, for us it represents a psychological reality that can work as a symbolic system. Sadly, the development of experimental science destroyed the ancient belief that the universe is a divine hierarchy of celestial powers (God, angels, nature spirits and so on). However, through thinking symbolically, you can recover your spiritual connection with a universe that's not just dead matter but an infinite, living being. You can recognize where you belong in the universal scheme, and learn to treat the world and all that's in it with deep respect. All the therapies and advice enshrined in the wisdom teachings aim at promoting a state of harmony both between the confusion of conflicting thoughts and feelings within, and between yourself and the world outside.

You already know that the planets are not simply dots of light in the night sky. As we've seen, every aspect of life can be understood as being under the rulership of one or another of them. In this chapter, you will develop and deepen your understanding of the way this system works, with the aim of learning to align yourself more closely with cosmic energies. This will create a deeper harmony in your life and a sense of rightness that brings profound satisfaction and happiness.

We're going to be exploring a seven-step system, using the seven planets known in antiquity: Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. These make a kind of symbolic ladder that you can ascend until you are only one step below heaven. According to the ancient wisdom, the final step can only be taken through the intervention of divine grace – as if a helping hand reached down from heaven to pull you in.

We begin logically with the viewpoint from planet Earth, just as if you were looking up at the night sky and observing how the planets move. So the first planetary step is the Moon, followed by Mercury and Venus, then the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

You've learned a little of planetary rulerships, but now it's time to find out that each of these planets has, in addition to its other rulerships, a connection with certain substances or human activities that can be used magically. These are as follows, and you're going to practise them all in a therapeutic way.

Moon	Stones and metals; engraved images
Mercury	Herbs, fruits, spices used in medicines; incense
Venus	Flowers and plants; all other scented things
Sun	Music, song and dance
Mars	Imagination: the mental force that stirs us into action
Jupiter	Orderly argument and cool reason
Saturn	Tranquil contemplation of the divine; meditation

Put all these together, and you have a blueprint for the therapeutic activities you need in order to harmonize and balance your life. Although the planets and their rulerships form a symbolic ladder, you don't try just one rung at a time, approaching meditation step by step. Rather, you turn to or combine the various planets as seems appropriate. It's up to you to experiment a bit and customize the scheme as your personality and needs suggest. So let's look at some of the ways you can climb this celestial ladder towards the balanced life and the highest happiness.

The Moon and her images

We start on the lowest rung with the Moon, Earth's own satellite. How might you use the images that the Moon rules? First, cast your mind back to what the Moon symbolizes in the human

personality. That's the instinctual self, the part of you that still belongs to the animal world, which reacts on impulse rather than thinking consciously. You slip gratefully into the lunar realm when you're very tired or relaxing from stress. It's your comfort zone, where nothing is demanded of you. Here is where you recuperate from the strains of life. Lying on the sofa eating chocolate is lunar, or enjoying old films on TV.

So, the Moon relates largely to your home environment, or to the comfort areas you set up for yourself at work. You familiarized yourself with this idea in [Chapter One](#). And here's where images come in, and where you can expand your appreciation of lunar things. What kind of images do you have in your home, and how do they make you feel? We're not just talking about pictures on the wall, but also decorative items such as vases, figurines, even cushions. You may be someone who likes to crowd the mantelpiece with knick-knacks, or you may be a collector of one particular kind of item. On the other hand, you might prefer your surroundings to be uncluttered. What is vital right now is that you find out exactly what effect each piece of furniture, picture or item has on you. How do you feel when you enter each room of your home? Do you prefer some rooms to others? How much control do you have over the décor? Are you perhaps dutifully displaying unwanted and unloved gifts?



Developing sensitivity

- Try to tune in to your reactions at a very subtle level when you step inside your front door. We're too used to taking our surroundings for granted, hardly seeing them at all as we make for the kitchen to switch on the kettle, or the computer to go online. The Moon asks you to slow down and become aware of how far you're truly comfortable in your own nest.
- Once you begin to identify the difference in your most basic reactions as you pass from room to room, you can make adjustments accordingly. Maybe you love to cook,

in which case the kitchen is bound to be one of your favourite rooms and one in which everything is just as you like it. But perhaps you neglect the bedroom. Is your bed comfortable? If there are pictures on the wall, what are they like? Angular, vividly coloured abstract images are unlikely to promote rest, whereas softly coloured, blurry shapes might help you drift towards sleep. Only you, however, know what attracts you – and how you want to feel in the bedroom!

- It can help to make notes on what pleases or displeases you. That way, you can improve your home bit by bit, ticking off items on the list as you are satisfied. Of course, unless you live alone you will have to take into account your friends' or family's tastes. But at least you will know where in the house you're happiest.

Everything surrounding you has some effect – it's just that usually you're too distracted by your thoughts to be aware of it. Experiments have shown that people will automatically tend to tidy up a bit if they catch the scent of cleaning liquids. That's how easily your actions can be changed by the smallest, subtlest suggestion. Only by becoming consciously aware of your surroundings can you truly make the most of them. The Moon is all about creating the world you want.

That can be just as important at work, of course. Most of us won't enjoy a significant amount of control over the appearance of our workplace, though you may have chosen a job because the surroundings suit you. If you work in a shop selling clothes you love, for example, then your Moon is already satisfied. But the neutral office environment can be more problematic. Saturn rules hard work, and his presence can be seen in the structure of the workplace with its hard edges, straight lines and strictly practical items. But here, amongst the computers and copiers, try to find room for a plant or a picture or two – little reminders of lunar comfort. For example, the family photo is a little piece of lunar nourishment to balance out Saturn's influence.

Let's look now at images you can carry around with you. We've already discussed talismans. These are directly magical images, but there is also magic to be found elsewhere in daily life. Most

people own a piece of jewellery that means a lot to them; that has, in fact, talismanic value. Maybe it was a gift from someone very dear to you; maybe it recalls a place where you were particularly happy. These things too have immense value for embellishing your everyday existence with rich layers of emotional resonance. You can make a point of wearing something with positive associations every time you need cheering, comforting or supporting in some way.

So far we've been looking at images that have private significance, but respecting the presence of lunar images in our lives also involves filtering out those we don't want. Television, the internet and the advertising industry all bombard us with images, most of them aimed at getting us to buy goods or services. In other words, they manipulate us. In a very real way, advertising uses magical techniques to put us under a spell of desire. Once we've been convinced we want something, we lose the power to think rationally. Images can make us very unhappy, too, and even ill. Just think of the arguments surrounding computer-manipulated fashion photographs of very thin teenage girls. Even women who realize these pictures present a fictitious idea of beauty can be affected by them and suffer feelings of inadequacy.

How do you protect yourself against the power of advertising? Once again, it's a matter of becoming aware of your feelings. As you flick through a magazine or ride up an escalator you might not think you're feeling anything much, but listen in to your reactions and you'll begin to discover that almost every image has an effect. Either it pleases you – the first stirring of desire – or it appears unpleasant – in which case, you might consider why. Some, of course, will be neutral, as they don't touch your life.

Images are one of the basic ingredients of magic. As such, their power shouldn't be taken for granted. You can use images to make you feel safe, nourished and surrounded by beauty. Conversely, you can learn to repel the bad magic of manipulative advertising that seeks to keep you always in a state of desire that can never quite be satisfied.

Only when we reach the highest planet, Saturn, can we enter into a calm state where desire falls away, revealing the peace that, miraculously, lies at the core of our being.

Mercurial medicine

Let's step up onto the next planetary rung. We arrive in the sphere of Mercury, who, according to the ancient wisdom, rules over all the natural ingredients of medicines. How can you bring his influence into your daily life? We won't study the ancient recipes for medicinal pills and drinks, because they tend to be very much of their time. The recipes are extremely complicated and include many substances that would be hard for us to find.

However, the wisdom teachings include the belief that everything we eat or drink belongs to one or other of the planets and can be beneficial or harmful according to our needs and circumstances. In this respect, we should think of all food and drink as potentially medicinal, and much of the advice enshrined in the teachings is concerned with daily meals rather than with pills and other concoctions. Here we can glean some useful guidelines.

The ancient wisdom anticipates modern health advice by insisting that a good diet is essential for health. Indeed, traditional views on the subject may sound eerily familiar – some things simply don't change over the course of time. First of all, we are told that a healthy diet requires good food, cooked simply and enjoyed in moderation. The wisdom recommends caring for your health by taking your time over food, appreciating it, and sometimes practising a short fast. A sound diet doesn't require a great deal of variety, as long as it covers all your basic nutritional needs; what's important is that everything you eat or drink should be of the best quality you can find or afford.

One of the most important rules is that food should be grown in conditions that you too would find pleasant in which to live. That means that you should choose your ingredients from places that are sunny, refreshed by winds, and clear of stagnant water. What's desirable above all is freshness: sunshine, breezes and running water promote health in food ingredients as well as in people. You should reject food that's been kept too long.

The basics of the traditional diet are bread and wine, which are also highly magical substances whose esoteric history goes right back to ancient Greece. Religious mystery cults celebrated the discovery of these essential substances, considered to be the gifts

of Ceres and Bacchus respectively. Bread gives us the supportive 'staff of life', and the intoxicating power of wine allows us to allay the cares of human existence.

We can leave bread to the bakers, except to note that the term 'staff of life' is used because traditionally baked bread includes so much nutritional value that it's actually possible to live on it – for a while, anyway. However, commercially baked bread does not have such good food value, so it's wise to look around and buy the best possible.

We've already mentioned wine and its virtues, but there's more to say. Here too you are recommended to buy the best possible quality. The finest wines known to mankind are clear and fragrant, and produced in a healthy climate. These days the idea of drinking wine medicinally has fallen out of favour, but in former times it was widely recommended. Wine was often drunk watered, a practice that you can usefully adopt. And remember, the ancient wisdom recommends wine as a remedy for melancholy. However, as you're aiming for a balanced life, moderation is essential.

A careful appreciation of wine can help to remind us that it is a gift of the gods. The wine god Bacchus was called the Liberator, since wine frees us from pain and cares. By learning to use wine and its scent in your search for harmony you can begin to experience once more the pleasure taken throughout history in this mysterious substance.

You might be inclined to consider meat more essential to your diet than wine or even bread, and the ancient wisdom has advice on this subject too. First, the animals you eat should have been fed well on healthy food, for otherwise their flesh won't have any nourishment to benefit you. If it's not possible to find meat produced under such conditions, it's better to leave it out of your diet: that would mean eating organic meat. But the wisdom teachings don't recommend eating meat every day. The reason is that the daily diet should, as we've seen, be based on foods that are as fresh as possible. Meat, like everything else, should be eaten in moderation.

Remember that your aim is always to harmonize the four humours of the body – heat, cold, moisture and dryness. Thus, if you're cold, you need hot food, whereas summer is the time for

cold drinks and salads. It's best to eat seasonal food, simply because it's natural to do so – and locally produced food is, of course, the freshest.

As for actual medicine, you should take advantage of all available kinds. Herbal remedies might be appropriate for minor problems, but in many cases allopathic treatment is called for. You might also explore other alternatives, such as homeopathy. Acupuncture has much in common with the ancient wisdom, as it seeks to balance the four humours and create a state of harmony in the body. As you become increasingly aware of your body's needs, you'll learn to choose remedies wisely.

These simple guidelines are worth following. If you do so, you will probably find that you naturally give up foods that are not good for you because your taste will change along with your diet, and your palate will become more refined and sensitive. But remember that you're never simply considering the body's good; by caring for your diet you're harmonizing subtle energies and taking another step up the ladder of the planets that leads ultimately to spiritual revelation.

Venus and her scented roses

We now move from the physical body into a slightly more refined realm, although at first it might not seem so. Let's enter the sphere of the goddess Venus. She is of course primarily concerned with love, but she also has charge over sensual pleasures of all kinds. The ancient wisdom has an interesting take on the five senses. Since the focus is on spiritual wellbeing, sensuality is not valued for itself. However, the five senses are part of our physical make-up and as such they have their purposes.

The wisdom teachings list the senses according to whether or not they involve actual physical contact. By this reckoning, touch and taste score quite low, whereas smell, sight and hearing all enjoy a higher proportion of spiritual content. So with Venus and scent we move away from the physicality of the body and closer to the mysterious entity that is spirit. Remember that the spirit is a fine and subtle substance that binds your soul and body together. It can't be seen, but you can recognize its presence.

According to the teachings, scent has a lot in common with

spirit, which means that it can have a profound effect on us. Both scent and spirit, says the wisdom, are a kind of vapour. Air, on which scent is carried, is so similar to spirit that the two mingle effortlessly, affecting both body and soul in a subtle but profound manner. The similarity means that odours can nourish the spirit. We can see that scent can be good for us if we can take this idea right back to basics in a way that is very relevant in our polluted world. For air itself has a certain scent and is as necessary as food, not just to our health but to our very survival. The teachings tell us that it's vital to breathe air that's pure and full of sunlight, neither too hot nor too cold, too damp nor too dry.

Of course, these days we are well aware of air pollution in both city and country. How is it possible to keep your spirit healthy under such conditions? Just as you are recommended to choose a healthy place to live and an occupation that nourishes your abilities, so you should try to find a home where the air is as unpolluted as possible. If that proves difficult, you can learn to do the spirit some good through a judicious use of scents.

The teachings state that the spirit should be refreshed every day by a variety of carefully chosen odours. You probably won't be surprised to be reminded that you should value the scent of wine very highly. In fact, you are recommended to choose it above all other scents, for it will nourish both your spirit and your body by helping to bring the four elements into balance, while also delighting the sense of smell. Simply smelling wine is ideal for cheering yourself up and banishing melancholy. Also effective are the scents of cinnamon, aniseed and sweet fennel – all quite strong and spicy odours that warm the spirit. And if you're finding it difficult to concentrate, you can regain alertness by sharper scents such as toast, coriander, citron or mint.

Is such a gentle therapy likely to work? Well, just try it. You might cheat a little and drink some wine after enjoying the scent – or eat the toast, for that matter! Remember that you should always adapt the remedies for individual use. Scent seems to be linked to memory more closely than any other sense, and you can learn to use that to your advantage. There may well be a scent that you associate with happy memories from childhood – perhaps a garden scent, or one of cooking or ironing. At times when you need spiritual comfort, it can be profoundly helpful to

re-create such an odour. Just experiment a little, and you'll begin to realize why the ancient wisdom links scent and spirit so closely.

The teachings also recommend enjoying scents from nourishing food, the logic being that the fragrance of food is its spiritual part. Hot bread, roasted meat or warm honey can do far more than just get your mouth watering. Conversely, of course, odours from bad foods are to be avoided – as are any odours that seem unpleasant to you or that arouse unwelcome memories. With practice, you can create a kind of personal aromatherapy so that you can choose exactly the right scent according to circumstances.

What about the practical aspects of this rung of the planetary ladder? Happily, it's easy to buy various natural scents in an oil base, so if you don't happen to have access to fresh plants you can use these to re-create garden and herb scents. If you live in a city, you may be able to plant a window box with aromatic herbs, while those who live in the country can create an old-fashioned herb and scented flower garden. And there are a variety of ways to use scents. Incense or essential oils can be burnt at home, but why not also keep incense at work for moments when you need calming or revitalizing?

You can also scent your bath, either with essential oils or with herb-or flower-based bubble baths. In fact, it's important to choose scented bathroom items and cosmetics with care. Try out a broad range until you have a clear idea of what appeals to you most, then stick to your choice. You'll soon learn which scents make you feel really good, and that goes for applying perfume as well. Many women – and increasingly, men too – find their favourite and then use that exclusively.

In the spring and summer, you can indulge in sensual enjoyment of flowers and foliage in parks, gardens or the countryside. The natural world celebrates the season of fertility with a riot of Venusian scents. If you have a garden, you might like to plant odiferous herbs such as rosemary, or a camomile lawn that exudes scent when you walk on it. But in winter, it's time to create your own inner garden within the home by the means mentioned above.

It can be useful, as you experiment with all kinds of scents, to

keep a notebook for jotting down your reactions. Over time, this can build up to a handy reference book for harmonizing and revitalizing your spirit under any circumstances. Don't forget what the teachings say: that scent is a spiritual essence capable of touching your own inner spirit directly.

We inhabit a world that tends to replace natural scents with artificial ones, and many of us live in circumstances where the sense of smell can be a positive drawback. We need to rediscover this sense, to alert ourselves to the good experiences it can bring. Once you've really experienced how profoundly scent can enrich your life, you may well feel inclined to agree with the wisdom teachings.

The music of the spheres

We arrive next at the Sun, the giver of life, warmth and light. Remember that the Sun is identified with the god Apollo, who in ancient Greek mythology gave mankind the gift of music. With Venus and her rulership of scents, you began to see how something with no apparent substance can affect you both physically and spiritually. That process continues with the Sun and Apollo's music. According to the ancient wisdom, a song or tune is a living thing, a spiritual being that affects your spirit directly. Music is as invisible as spirit; it's wafted on moving air; it displays feelings. Some music is vocal, so it has a voice, too, and can express meaning. And it's made up of various parts that work harmoniously together like the components of a body. In all these aspects, it's like a kind of intelligent spiritual animal.

Music as a living being! That idea may strike you as quaint, but it reflects an acknowledgement of the power of music to move us emotionally. In the ancient wisdom, music has an even more profound importance; it's vital to our spiritual and physical health because it expresses the underlying harmony of the cosmos. Let's think about harmony for a moment. Usually, the spirit and body are in harmony with each other. Indeed, if that were not so, we couldn't function. But illness or emotional upset jangles us; we fall out of harmony as the four humours become out of proportion to each other. We've already looked at remedies for keeping in good health, but until now we haven't considered the final ingredient – music.

The teachings state that music restores harmony to the spirit, and that since spirit and body are linked, it also benefits physical health. Along with physical harmony comes a soothing of the emotions. We can find this idea in the Old Testament, with the story of David calming Saul by playing his harp. The healing power of music is acknowledged today and used for an astonishing range of purposes, from promoting community spirit to helping those suffering from autism. So you can see that this is a powerful energy and one well suited to the Sun and Apollo.

Through music you can bring both body and spirit into harmony not only with each other, but also with the world itself. There is an ancient and poetical image of Apollo regulating the seasons with his lyre. By playing the lowest string, he brings about winter; the middle strings create spring and autumn, and the highest one, summer. A skilled musician can open himself or herself to Apollonian power by playing the right sort of music at a suitable time.

Very few people are immune to the power of music, and we've probably all used music from time to time to create or enhance a particular mood. Now you'll learn to refine this common habit by following a few basic rules for harmonizing yourself with the universe through astrology. If you follow this advice, you can use music in the most effective way possible. As with all the ancient remedies, the aim is to achieve a physical and spiritual harmony with the life of the universe, to open yourself to the beneficent forces keeping the cosmos in balance.

Of course, not all of us are musicians or singers. Ideally, you should take the following guidelines as ground rules for composition or for guiding you towards the right kind of music to play or sing. But while making music is particularly powerful and rewarding, you can still reap huge benefits simply by listening to the right music at the right time.

The first rule is that you should decide what effects you want your music to have, and relate those to the relevant planet. Do you need to be stirred into action? Then music suggestive of Mars will be suitable. Perhaps you want to invite love into your life; Venusian music is called for. A good place to start is to look first at the words of a song to see if they're right for your purposes, but you also need to consider the kind of music that each planet

rules. The Moon, Saturn and Mars do not, in fact, have any songs but only the inarticulate voice of music. Mars's music is fast, sharp and fierce, while Saturn's is slow, harsh, and sad. The Moon has music somewhere between these two extremes.

The other four planets can be invoked through song as well as tunes. Jupiter's music is deep-toned, earnest, sweet, and joyful. Venus enjoys songs that are sensuous and elegant. The Sun is invoked by songs of grace and reverence, while Mercury's music is witty and relaxed, energetic and complex, like Mercury himself. You should remember that such rules are never hard and fast. Anybody's judgement of music is inevitably subjective, for everyone's taste is individual. But that's fine – the vital thing is that you know how to choose music that affects you powerfully.

The second rule is that you use the branch of astrology that assigns each country to an astrological ruler. For example, in traditional astrology India is a solar country and hence produces mostly Apollonian music. If you want to invoke Apollo, you could play Indian music or study it so that you can compose similar-sounding pieces. You can find a list of countries and their appropriate planets [here](#), so you don't need to be an astrologer to follow this rule – just choose some appropriate world music.

The third and final rule does, however, require some astrological knowledge. You need to consider the daily movements of the planets and the aspects they form to each other, and to compose or listen to music that suits the kind of actions these aspects suggest. However, you can resort to a simpler method and just find the correct planetary hour for your purpose (see [here](#)). Once these three rules have been taken into consideration, you're ready to listen to or play your astrological music.

What we're talking about here is not dissimilar to the rituals we described earlier for invoking planetary powers, which also included music. Remember that you're always focused on harmonizing yourself with the cosmos, and using the energy of the planets is one of the simplest and most powerful ways of doing so.

Of course, you can integrate music into your life without any ritual. All it takes is a level of alertness and appreciation of how particular pieces of music affect you. You will then know where

to turn when you need cheering up or calming down. Those of us who are used to having music as a background noise to accompany other activities might have to learn again how to listen with full concentration. Music is a powerful force – a spiritual being, as we've seen – but you'll only receive its full benefits if you open yourself to them. You should treat music with respect, giving it all your attention. Then Apollo will fill your being with light and healing, as he did so often for the practitioners of the ancient wisdom.

Mars and the imagination

We move on now to the sphere of Mars, and it is with this traditionally forceful, warlike planet that we find to our surprise we've left the world of the senses behind. Here we're in the realm of the imagination and mental creativity.

Astrology characterizes Mars as a powerful force that can be expressed either in a formidable will and determination, or in uncontrolled anger and aggression. So, this energy's link with the imagination needs explaining – and we should remember too that Mars is a difficult energy with which to deal. You can think of it as a kind of necessary evil to be approached with caution, just as a homeopathic doctor might use microscopic doses of a poisonous substance as a cure. After all, Mars is associated with war and discord, whereas we are seeking inner peace and harmony with the cosmos.

The kind of energy Mars symbolizes finds its expression most naturally in physical action rather than mental effort, but it does have its place in the world of thought and emotion. Indeed, the imagination really does have martial qualities of force and purpose. An old esoteric maxim states that action follows on from thought, and (except in cases of instinctual action) that is true. We can't perform any purposeful activity without thinking about it first, not even getting up in the morning or making a cup of tea. The thought may be minimal, but it does have to be present. Mars rouses us to action.

But in what sense can you use this to further your happiness and deepen a sense of fulfilment? In fact, the ancient wisdom gives very few clues, preferring not to mention Mars except in a medical context where herbs containing martial heat are

recommended for a sluggish patient. So here we have to find our own way – which is in itself a martial thing to do.

Try thinking of this exciting, productive energy in terms of your own life. What place does the power of imagination have in it? That can be quite a difficult question to answer, and you might even need to start your exploration of Mars's sphere on a very basic level, by developing your imagination. The busy pace of life can keep us so distracted that it's all too easy to ignore inner promptings and creative yearnings. But where does the imagination go when you're spending all your time at work and in socializing?

When every moment of your time is accounted for and all your entertainment laid on for you, the imagination has very little space in which to play or develop. Remember, martial imagination is an active force. You're not using your imagination creatively when you sit down to watch television. It takes effort to be imaginative, and that activity and force is the essence of Mars. Rather than absorbing the entertaining results of other people's creativity, you can try taking martial action by drawing out your own innate resources.

So, first you need to discover where your creativity might find expression. You can start modestly, or be bold and try something new. Then you can begin making space for it in your life. That might mean cutting down on other activities, which may at first seem difficult – but the result will be that you lead a more balanced and fulfilling life. Perhaps your imaginative path will take you to classes where you can improve your skills, or you may practise in private until you feel ready to share the results. You might prefer to keep your creative efforts absolutely quiet, or you might develop such a shining talent that it naturally finds itself in the public view. You just don't know until you try! Try to lose any sense of self-doubt or embarrassment – not everybody can be an out-and-out creative genius, and some of what you produce might be disappointing, particularly at first.

Once you have a better grasp of the power of Mars, you'll find that even watching television or reading a book can be an imaginative exercise. As long as your mind is alert, as long as you're responding with questions and ideas, then you're participating rather than being passive.

Whatever happens with your creative imagination, it's important that you find room in your life for its expression. The wisdom teachings recognize that Mars is the life force. Without it, we sink into torpor, but when we find it in ourselves, it brings us fully alive as individuals. This can feel like a rebirth, energizing not only the body but the spirit and soul as well.

Feasting with Jupiter

The next rung up the planetary ladder is that of Jupiter. In traditional astrology, Jupiter is thought to be one of the most beneficial of planets, especially for people afflicted by melancholy. In the scheme we're now looking at, Jupiter stands for the kind of thought that is one step up from active imagination: reason, discussion and logic. That may sound rather dull to you, but if we flesh out this statement with traditional beliefs about Jupiter's nature, you'll soon see a more cheerful picture. Jupiter, after all, is the planet associated with joviality, good company and expansiveness of all kinds (including that of the waistline).

Once you've found time to honour your imagination and the individual creativity that it expresses, you're ready to use your mind in a different way. The orderliness of Jupiterian rationality balances the spontaneous creativity of martial imagination, and harmony and balance is what you're after. Whereas imagination can express the essence of your being, rational thought gives you the ability to philosophize, learn about the universe and consider divine matters. As you know, the true meaning of philosophy is finding out how to live well and happily. Therefore the power of reason is extremely important, and like any other ability, it can only be developed by regular use. So how do you go about this?

Since Jupiter rules conviviality, the pursuit of reason is a joyful matter. We're not in a schoolroom atmosphere here but at a party, and we have a suitably festive example to follow: that of Plato's dialogue *The Symposium*. We discussed this celebrated piece of philosophy [here](#). Throughout the dialogue, the subject of love is seriously discussed among increasingly relaxed and finally almost riotous surroundings.

The combination of pleasant company, good conversation and a smidgen of wine to free up tongues does more than allow

discussion. It's nourishing in many ways, allowing you to relax among friends, enjoy good food, give and take affection and enjoy jokes together. The symposium is not so very different from a dinner party today – albeit there seems to have been a considerable emphasis on drinking! You can certainly follow this model if you wish to step up onto Jupiter's rung of the planetary ladder.

At first it might take some experimentation to get the recipe for a successful symposium right. The most important ingredients are the guests – inviting friends who would be taken aback at the idea of throwing ideas around isn't going to work. It's a good idea to choose a topic for discussion to start off with, although conversation may soon take a turn in another direction. It can help if someone steers the discussion back onto topic when necessary, but that needs a very light touch. After all, this is a party!

You don't necessarily need to hold a party formally, though. Simply settling down with a close friend or two and getting into some serious talk over food or drinks can be just as inspiring. The ancient wisdom recommends bringing Jupiter into your life by keeping company with people who are even-tempered and worthy of respect, but invoking Jupiter should always include an element of pleasure, and the virtue of humour is extremely important to the expression of this planet.

Masters of the wisdom teachings going right back to Plato believed that serious subjects are best approached in a witty style. That way, they are made both more palatable and more memorable. Humour is Jupiterian, just as conviviality is; the two go together. Practising serious thought and philosophy in this way is a million miles away from modern ideas of study, but it's hugely enjoyable and undeniably effective.

The ideas about friendship enshrined in the wisdom teachings originate with Pythagoras, who held friendship to be a sacred bond – so much so that he thought friends should be prepared to die for each other. You will remember Diotima's description of the ideal lovers being bound by a mutual pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, and that can just as well apply to friends. Discussion of ideas between friends can be one of the better ways to learn and develop your understanding of life.

According to the ancient wisdom, the ability to reason is an essential part of the human condition; if you don't develop it, you aren't living fully as a human being, nor can you be properly happy. Of course, the life of the senses is also a part of your makeup, but we've already seen that pursuing happiness solely in that direction tends to end in frustration and even ill health.

Friends can help to keep you on the path when you feel you're not developing as you should or when you need support. They give you love as well as sharing ideas with you. Once again, we return to the crucial idea of balance. In the world of the wisdom teachings, rationality is not dry, but fun – an essential part of an affectionate friendship that helps two or more people grow together into better and happier human beings.

In the sphere of Jupiter, you can enjoy heady insights into the meaning and purpose of life, while developing your friendships on levels that are deeper and more meaningful than those of everyday. Here is where you find conclusive proof that rational thought is far from dull, and that it has an essential place in the pursuit of philosophy, which is the art of happiness.

The tranquil sphere of Saturn

One more rung remains to be trodden on the planetary ladder. In the ancient scheme of the cosmos, Saturn guards the threshold of heaven – the reason being that before the invention of the telescope, this planet was the outermost that could be seen with the naked eye. Traditional belief teaches that beyond Saturn's crystal sphere revolve the fixed stars, and beyond them lies the abode of the Divine Power. Hence Saturn represents the activity that is simultaneously the furthest removed from our material world and that which liberates the divine spark animating us.

Remember, according to the wisdom teachings we are essentially divine beings, only we've forgotten this because ordinary life and worries overwhelm our attention. But the teachings' whole aim and intention is to guide us towards the rediscovery of our divine, harmonious spark, for only once we've found it can we fulfil our true nature and win the happiness that's our birthright.

Let's recap the climb towards this point. We started with the

Moon and the use of magical images as a means of reconnecting with the cosmic energy. That process continued with Mercury and the use of appropriate herbs and foods. Venus contributed aromatherapy. Then came the Sun, and Apollonian music to inspire the spirit. With Mars, we rose into the realm of the mind, liberating and expressing the imaginative power. Jupiter taught us to employ reason and introduced us to the thrill of mental exploration, all in a convivial atmosphere. But with Saturn we balance Jupiter's extroversion with a shift into solitude and quietness.

It is with Saturn that you will begin to realize fully that this ascent to your source and origin is a mystical path. Now, not everyone will want to follow the road into Saturn's sphere – you just might not feel ready to leave the material world behind. That's fine: the beauty of the planetary ladder is that there are benefits at every rung, so just practise what feels comfortable for you. Later you may want to go further, or not – either way, you will know what's right for you. It's important to remember that no one else can tell you this. Listen to your inner voice, your *daimon*, and you will be in safe hands.

But if you feel somehow dissatisfied with life and yearn for inner peace, this is a wonderful teaching. Saturn, in his lofty and remote orbit so close to the Divine Power, represents the pursuit of true mystical experience, which is essentially solitary. It has to be said that the soul's need for solitude is one that's not honoured in our culture, to the point that many people aren't even aware of it. Indeed, many of us fear solitude.

Our lives are so busy that it's curiously difficult to sit and do nothing, alone, for any length of time. You've tried this already, in the exercise in Chapter One ([here](#)), so you know that you'll almost certainly begin to feel restless and twitchy before long. We're used to constant input, and left without it our instinct is to grab for a mobile, or turn on the computer, TV or radio. There is no peace here and no recognition that solitude might have any value.

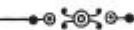
Yet if you're to enter Saturn's sphere, you must find solitude and quiet. Here is where you practise tranquillity – in other words, meditation. In order to find the sacred spark within, you have to open yourself to the ultimate divine energy. The wisdom

advice is quite specific; you are to make yourself in the image of divinity itself. Just as the Divine Power is single, still and tranquil, so should you be. But don't imagine that this is a lonely or boring thing to do. Quite the contrary – the experience of liberating the soul is blissful, and it can bring you into a sense of unity with the cosmos and even the Divine Power itself.

How can you begin to integrate meditation into your life? First you need to cultivate a sense of Saturnian discipline. To be effective, meditation needs to be practised regularly. Set aside a time daily for a session, and don't be too ambitious. It's better to meditate for a short while daily than to have a long session once a week. Decide on the time of your daily session, and stick to it – and on the few occasions when you can't, don't beat yourself up about it. But don't be slack, either, otherwise the exercise becomes pointless.

There are plenty of books that will advise you on how to meditate, and many methods to follow. You may also find local classes, for example at a Buddhist centre. Meditating in a group can be a highly effective way of learning and developing your practice, and if you have access to classes you should definitely join up. A trained teacher will keep you on track, and you'll benefit from the shared energy of a class.

Experiment to see what method suits you best, and don't expect immediate results. Meditation goes against the grain of our daily life to such an extent that learning how to do it can be a slow process. However, it changes you more deeply than you might expect, and once you begin to experience the insights it brings, you'll put more energy into it. Therefore it's vital to persevere, even if you think it's not going well. Actually, it's very difficult to judge what's happening, and you'll almost certainly realize after a time – with a pleasurable shock! – that you are gaining a better and more positive perspective on life and a deeper insight into its mysteries.



Meditation

- For now, it would be good to start with a simple

meditation exercise that you can use while you begin to look around for classes or detailed instructions. Let's try a basic breathing meditation.

- Settle yourself in your quiet place. Ideally, you should adopt the lotus position, which is the traditional meditation posture. Sit cross-legged, with either one or both feet resting on the opposite thigh. You'll find placing a cushion under your buttocks helpful. Sit with your head and spine erect, as if you were suspended from a thread. Cup your left hand within your right hand on your lap, with the tips of your thumbs pressed lightly together.
- If this posture is too demanding, simply sit in an upright chair, with legs uncrossed and both feet flat on the floor, your hands in the cupped position.
- Lower your eyes, but don't fully shut them in case that makes you sleepy. Check your body (especially your shoulders) for tension, and relax without slumping. Now, take three deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling deeply. Then breathe naturally. Focus your attention on the movement of air as it passes in and out of your nostrils. Don't squint at your nose, but be aware of your breathing. You may find counting the breaths helpful. Count to ten and then begin again.
- Try this for five or ten minutes at first. As you become accustomed to meditating, slowly lengthen your sitting time. Each time you finish, you should seal your meditation by remembering your spiritual purpose and sitting for a moment more before you get up.
- You might think this is a simple exercise, but it's much more difficult than it sounds! You're aiming to calm your thoughts so thoroughly that you enter a tranquil state, focused on your breath lightly and effortlessly, but your mind will rebel and ramble all over the place. That's natural: as soon as you become aware of your thoughts wandering, just return to counting. Don't get upset. Just do what you're there to do: watch the breath. This is the

starting place for further meditations using images and discursive thought.

Meditation should be enjoyable, not a chore, otherwise you'll lose your will to pursue the practice. Once you've become used to the basic breathing meditation, you can vary your practice by trying a method recommended in the wisdom teachings. This is a visual meditation that should be enjoyable and will also focus you on your aim of harmonizing yourself with the divine cosmic forces.

The teachings describe making an image of the cosmos. Here we have, in a way, come full circle, linking back to the sphere of the Moon and her images. But this cosmic image is all-encompassing: in effect, it's a model or picture of the planetary spheres with which you have been working. Meditating on it will remind you of what you should be doing, and inspire you in your efforts to live harmoniously.

How you make the image is up to you. In an ideal world, you would make or commission a working model of the cosmos, sculpted in bronze and gilded with silver – but that's probably beyond the means of most people! A more workable alternative would be to paint a cosmic image. You should use the colours of Venus, the Sun and Jupiter – green, gold and sapphire blue. And since we are thinking magically, you should, if possible, create (or at least complete) this image at the ideal astrological time for imbuing it most effectively with cosmic power.


That time is on 21 March, the equinox and first day of spring, when the Sun enters Aries, the first sign of the zodiac. In traditional astrology this is considered to be the birthday of the world, when life begins anew each year. You probably won't want to wait a long time to make your image, so an alternative would be to choose a day – if possible, the very moment – when the Moon enters Aries. That happens monthly, and can be checked online or in an ephemeris (which lists the daily positions of the planets). But you should be careful not to create your model if this day falls on a Sunday, for at the Creation that was the day on which God rested. You should also make sure you put the final touches to your image during the planetary hour of the Sun. Then the image will be infused with all the energy and potential of a newly born being.

Once you have your cosmic image, you can either carry it about with you (if it's small enough) or keep it in a quiet room in your house, where you can retire to contemplate it. A cosmic image should inspire cosmic thoughts. Here are some ideas for you to develop.



Cosmic journey

- Sit in front of your image and spend a few minutes calming your thoughts with a breathing meditation. Then focus on the image.
- Create a journey that takes you through the planetary spheres. It might be enough simply to focus on your cosmic image, but you can also assemble items to represent each of the planets and hold or look at them as you move up the planetary ladder. Use the planetary order given in this chapter.
- Starting with the Moon, visualize each planetary deity as a beautiful, friendly and helpful spiritual being who welcomes you into his or her sphere. Soak yourself in the atmosphere of each planet, until you feel that you've imbibed some of its essence. Spend as long as you like doing this. Then thank the planetary deity and move on to the next sphere.
- When you've finished with Saturn's sphere, try to open yourself to the pure energy that lies beyond. Just be aware of it – don't try to enter it. Then imagine yourself floating gently down through space until you slip easily into your own body again.
- Spend a little while on the breathing meditation to ground yourself properly. Then go over the journey in your mind. What did you learn from it? With which planets did you feel most at home? Note down any insights you've gained.



Planetary energies

- This meditation helps you to focus on particular planetary energies with which you might need some practice. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and you probably realize by now which planetary spheres feel awkward or unappealing.
- Prepare yourself for meditation as usual. Now focus on one planet that you want to integrate into your life. As before, you can use your imagination or have a suitable item to tune you into the energy.
- Approach the planetary divinity with the confidence that he or she has only been waiting for you to ask for help. Explain your problem and ask for assistance.
- Now wait peacefully for the reply. Don't try to use your imagination to put words in the divinity's mouth. Something will happen, even if it's on so subtle a level that you're not yet aware of it. You may well hear an inner voice or get a sudden intuition. Remain quiet and receptive until you feel the message has been given.
- Thank the deity, and return to your body as before. Spend some quiet time absorbing the message, or letting your unconscious knowledge sink in. It will rise into awareness in good time.



Receiving the Divine Power

- If you are confident enough, you can simply empty your mind of all thoughts, creating space for the Divine Power to enter. As with the breathing meditation, this is far harder than it sounds! You will need to have made good

progress with the breathing meditation and be able truly to calm your mind before you attempt this. It's important, too, to be in a very positive frame of mind when you practise this meditation.

- Once your thoughts are stilled, simply focus on your cosmic image. Realize that the Divine Power created the entire universe, with you as part of it. Recall your inner divine spark. Try to sense it.
- Now do your best to empty your mind and simply open up to the divine energy suffusing the cosmos. Have complete confidence that it is purely good, beautiful and true. Be aware that you are part of it. Allow yourself to fill with divine essence. This should feel blissful, light and calm.
- When the feeling fades, focus on your breathing and ground yourself properly before leaving your meditation space.

Whatever you choose to do, your aim is to absorb the cosmic energy to such an extent that when you leave the meditation room you retain an inner calm, no longer distracted by the rush and anxieties of daily life. Once you've achieved that inner serenity, you can rest secure in the understanding that you've found your place in the cosmos, that you've achieved harmony. Following the law of the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, you will have so internalized the cosmic image that you are now in tune with the movements of the planets and the harmony of the spheres.

As above, so below. Meditation can bring you to a realization of the essential identity of your own being with that of the magical universe in which we live. Once you've achieved this inner harmony, life goes on apparently as normal. But your inner awareness will be completely different, for you will be unshakeably calm no matter what happens.

This is the aim and ideal – but it's not something you're likely to achieve in a short time. However, you will find that pursuing this goal up all the rungs of the planetary ladder is an excellent way of making life enjoyable and drawing the sting out of painful

situations. Although you may doubt your own ability to rise to such spiritual heights, that's no reason for not setting your foot on the planetary ladder, for every tiny step you make will improve your sense of true pleasure and satisfaction in life. You will have a focus, a purpose, and you will learn to see the world as a magically beautiful place in which each of us is fulfilling a unique destiny. That perception alone is a wonderful gift.

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Six
<i>Make a list of the seven planets and how their energies can be contacted. Now think about personalizing this list: for example, how can you best integrate the Moon's magical images into your daily life?</i>
<i>Do your planetary rituals relate to the Ladder of the Planets? Consider this question and note down your responses.</i>
<i>Re-read the Cosmic Image Meditations. Decide how you will use these meditations, and which you will focus on to start with.</i>
<i>Think of ways you can get a quick fix of planetary energy. Note some ideas for boosting specific energies in need, such as carrying a Venusian scent in your bag.</i>

7 *The Secret of Happiness*

We're reaching the last stage of our journey towards true happiness, and it's time to reflect on what the ancient wisdom has been teaching us. Let's look more closely at that wisdom, so that everything you've learnt so far can fall into its proper place.

Universal truth

If you look back, you'll see that the ancient wisdom represents a holistic system covering all aspects of life. Care for the body's health combines with advice on emotional wellbeing, linked to a moral sense that is based on spiritual values. And for mystics there is instruction on using love and solitary meditation for final, complete liberation and union with the Divine Power.

Of course you can pick and choose from this advice, according to what suits your nature, but the more thoroughly you follow it the more of an increase in fulfilment you'll experience. This is because of the nature of the ancient beliefs; the system is holistic as it's based on wisdom that's universally accepted as truth.

At this point, it's important to remember the source of the wisdom. Although what you've read has never before been put into systematic form, all the ideas come from the Renaissance magus Marsilio Ficino. As well as being a Christian priest, he also followed the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers Pythagoras, Plato and the Neo-Platonists. Ficino was astonished to find that among the Greek philosophers Plato in particular seemed to have anticipated some of the teachings of Christ, and he believed strongly that pagan Greek philosophy could be reconciled with Christianity.

Why is all this important? It's because truth, by its very nature, must always be the same. If you are going to follow this path wholeheartedly, you need to know that you can repose confidence in these teachings because they're based on reliable truths about life and human nature. This chapter, then, outlines some of the elements of the ancient philosophy of life that might be useful to you as a way of understanding the world and your place in it. We've already touched on some of the points in earlier chapters, but an overview will allow you to see more clearly the

coherence of this philosophy.

There's another significance to this chapter, too. It may already have struck you that this book is organized in a manner that echoes the principles of Diotima's ladder of love. Starting on the level of the physical body, we've risen steadily through the realms of morals, emotions, spirit and soul. The path we've been following also reflects the mystical ascent through the planetary spheres. Now, both the path of love and the planetary ascent are initiations into mystical experience. And that's just what this book is, too. If you're reading it in the right frame of mind, it should be affecting you in subtle yet noticeable ways. Taking a reflective look at the over-arching philosophy of the ancient wisdom is the final step in your initiation.

Travel lightly, feel free

The wisdom teachings' view of life is profoundly religious. That might seem off-putting, but these religious beliefs are based on philosophical truths that can be tested and proved. Whether or not you worship a God or gods, you can still learn from the ancient wisdom, because one of its basic tenets is that an understanding of philosophy can lead the thoughtful person to a spiritual view of life.

The ancient wisdom views the world as a paradoxical place. It's been created by the Divine Power and is therefore supremely beautiful. But it's also at the furthest point of the universe from the perfection of heaven, which means our divine souls are weighed down by the heavy demands of material life. In the struggle to cope with the simple daily needs of existence, we forget too easily the joyful nature of our divine essence. What's more, the pursuit of money, pleasure, love and power distracts us.

But all this is illusory, according to the teachings. We are looking at the world in the wrong way and ignoring what our own experience has been trying to teach us. We search endlessly for satisfaction, security and happiness in the wrong places, doing our best to make money, get ahead at work and find the perfect partner. But nothing that we achieve can satisfy us, for nothing in the material realm lasts for very long. Spiritual truths, on the other hand, are eternal.

The wisdom warns that concentrating on your desires just brings trouble. You can try to push away the obvious truth of the uncertain nature of life and love, but the knowledge is there deep inside, unsettling you with the fear of failure or loss. You may set your sights on one particular aim and tell yourself that when you've fulfilled that desire, you'll never again want anything else. And it really feels like that! But the human heart is hungry beyond measure, and desire is its very nature.

The wisdom observes that even when you truly believe you want only one thing, your antennae are always out in search of something better. That's just human nature; when one person or achievement proves disappointing, you feel impelled to start chasing another. Even if you land your dream job or settle with your ideal partner, the happiness you feel won't last for ever. Either the novelty will wear off and you'll start seeing flaws in what you had imagined to be perfect, or circumstances will disrupt your comfort. Nothing you can achieve is guaranteed secure, for everything that comes into your life may also leave it.

One of the immutable laws of life is, paradoxically, that it is in a constant state of flux. Love is followed by loss and health by sickness; then a new lover comes your way and recovery follows illness. Children grow up and become parents, and even your own tastes change over time. None of these changes are under your control. Given the insecurity of life, why, asks the wisdom, do you try to grab on to things that won't last? It's like trying to fill yourself up with emptiness, or catch the wind.

How then should you live? The teachings reveal that it is the law of nature that you do not need much to be happy. That's quite a startling thought at first – it goes so counter to the ethos of our materialistic society. But if you think about it, much of your effort and toil is aimed at getting hold of superfluous things.



Packing for your spiritual journey

- You might need to take a little time to consider this idea, so go to your quiet place and calm your thoughts. Then reflect on what you've recently bought, say over the past

month. Include items for others as well as yourself.

- First of all think of items that are replacing old or worn-out things. Question yourself as you visualize these belongings. Was the item you've thrown out or replaced really at the end of its useful life? What were your criteria for replacing it? Did boredom or over-familiarity come into the question at all? Maybe you just felt like a change? Or could you have mended the item or put it to some other use? In poor societies, where there is simply no money to replace items, the life of all goods is hugely extended.
- Now think about your clothes. Did you truly need that pair of shoes? Count up how many you own. You might be surprised. You may begin to realize that you are living in a society where excess is the norm. And yet, you know that the pleasure to be had from buying things is not only fleeting but addictive. So, try to imagine cutting down on what you buy. How would that make you feel? At first, it's bound to seem uncomfortable; you may even experience a rush of resentment at the very idea. But the truth is that simplifying life can free up your thoughts – and your time – for much more interesting and rewarding pursuits.

The ancient wisdom advises you to lighten your life by living as if you were going on a journey, so although you are supplied with necessities, you're unburdened by luxury. But the advice is not just intended as a guide to reducing your spending: it has resonance on a deep psychological level.

When travelling, it's easy to accept and enjoy the constant changes in your surroundings and the people you meet and leave behind. But that's exactly what life itself is like – a journey through a changing landscape. If you can accept this, you will loosen your grip on the things to which you cling for security. Knowing that nothing endures, you'll enjoy everything to the full, without expecting it to last for ever. The teachings don't suggest suppressing your desires, since they'll just boil away below the surface of consciousness until they burst out again. It's your approach to life that needs to be shifted a little, so that you're

able to live lightly, neither elated by success nor cast down by failure, because you know that things will soon be different.

Because of the ever-shifting scene, this journey through life has a dream-like quality. You naturally tend to clutch at what you perceive to be good and desirable, only to find it crumbles in your hand. Meanwhile, you go out of your way to avoid bad things happening, but inevitably it turns out that life surprises you with problems and losses you hadn't expected. The ancient wisdom exposes as an illusion the idea that you're in control of your life. It considers the soul to be sleeping, involving itself in dreams that you mistake for the real world. The underlying aim of all you've learnt so far is to try to make it easier for you to open your spiritual eyes and wake up to the real world: the realm of happiness.

Until that time, you're at the mercy of your imaginings, pulled here and there by the compulsion to clutch at what you want and run from what you don't like. And this, says the wisdom, is an exhausting waste of energy. Far better to take a deep breath, slow down, and reserve some quiet time to centre yourself in meditation so that you can begin to see what's true.

Through occasionally withdrawing from the hurly-burly of life you will begin to lose the habit of looking for happiness in the wrong places. Then you can start realigning yourself with the cosmos. Practising the cosmic meditations you learned in Chapter Six ([here](#)) can be very helpful. By finding the divine spark of harmony, goodness and love in your own depths, you also arrive at peace and contentment: that is, the fulfilment for which you were searching in the world outside. And because the divine spark is eternal, you can trust this peace.

Of course, you can't always remain in a state of meditation – not, at least, until you reach a very high level indeed of spiritual attainment! The pressures and commitments of life still have to be dealt with. But if you meditate regularly and deepen your understanding of the world as a dream, then you'll begin to find that you can maintain a certain level of calmness even under trying circumstances. Practising the exercises in this book will also help you along the way. Then you will start to experience inner fulfilment and realize that happiness is not entirely dependent on external circumstances. That is where true human

freedom begins.

The ancient wisdom values this inner freedom extremely highly; indeed, it is the only kind that matters. You know by now the reasons why: the human soul enslaves itself to the desire to possess and keep power, wealth and love. Only when you see the fleeting nature of such things do you learn to choose what's important to you and to enjoy it as it passes. The wisdom teachings call this 'restraint', because it's the opposite of the usual habit of tearing off in all directions after what you want.

Restraint is learnt through meditation, the process by which you learn more about yourself and how your emotions pull you around. Only if you practise restraint can you be free – which is a paradox until you think about it. Most people would consider freedom to lie in their ability to follow their desires, but by the standards of the wisdom teachings, that's living in bondage. If you're relying for happiness on something outside your soul, then you're enslaved to it; you're not free. Only when you turn inwards and locate the well of happiness there can you truly be considered in control of your life.

That is deep advice. You may appear to have a grip on life, but it's simply not true. Actually, you're being carried along on a tide of events largely beyond your control. Each decision you make sets off a chain of events that you can't predict. Say, for example, that you fall in love and decide to get married. That's traditionally known as a happy ending, but it's really a beginning. With marriage comes responsibility, the question of raising a family, a whole new set of relationships with in-laws and partner's friends. All of a sudden independence is a thing of the past. You're no longer drifting in a romantic dream: you're making a life with another person whose aims and ideals may not mesh completely with yours. That means compromise. Not only that, but the chances of unexpected events affecting you are suddenly doubled.

But if you have found some inner core of peace, then you have power within yourself to deal with everything that comes along, both good and ill. As the ancient wisdom puts it, you set a low value on what other people prize highly. That's possible because you know what is real and important.

Falling through the stars

Meditation doesn't come easy for most people. That might seem strange, seeing that in quiet contemplation we make contact with our true being. But there are good reasons for the restlessness, boredom and wandering attention that tend to plague those who try simply to sit still, abandoning any need for external stimulation and looking within for the sacred state of peace and unity.

The wisdom teachings explain this odd situation through myth. Remember the symbolic model of the universe that's been laid out for us. The Earth is the planet furthest from heaven and densely physical, and the other planets constantly revolve around it in their spheres. Beyond the moving planets lies the sphere of fixed stars, which revolves in the opposite direction to the planets. No wonder, says the ancient wisdom, we find it difficult to be still, when the very cosmos is constantly moving! But there is one more layer to the cosmos, at the very furthest point away from the Earth and therefore composed of purest spirit: it's heaven, the abode of the Divine. And that does not move, because it is perfect peace.

Now, we each contain a spark of divinity, the soul – and because of that, heaven is our true home. So what are we doing, living as far away as possible from where we belong? Plato explains our condition through a creation myth, which we can understand as a poetic way of telling the truth. In his dialogue *Timaeus*, Plato describes the Father of the universe talking to the lesser gods he has created. These gods are the spirits, or daimons (angels), that inhabit the planets, the elements and nature. The cosmos, says the Father, won't be perfect until another kind of being has been created; one that will fill a gap between the animals and the gods. This creature will be mankind, a kind of hybrid composed of a mortal body and an immortal soul. The divine Father will furnish the souls, while the task of making physical bodies is left to the lesser gods.

And so it is. Soul-stuff is made and divided up into as many parts as there are stars. Then bodies are made out of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water), and in them the souls are incarcerated. Later Platonic writers elaborated the tale so that

each soul comes to birth by falling from heaven down through the planetary spheres, taking on the appropriate qualities of each sphere to make up a subtle astral body. Landing on earth, the soul enters a body. The end result of either myth is the same: an immortal spiritual consciousness awakes to find itself trapped in a heavy physical body for which it has to care and which cloaks its true nature. Naturally, this causes immense suffering.

No wonder, says the wisdom, that certain philosophers in India and Thrace greet the birth of children with mourning but celebrate death with great joy. They recognize the truth, which is that life on earth is a kind of trap from which death frees us. *Soma-sema* – the body is a grave – is an ancient saying that Plato adopted from Pythagorean wisdom.

The teachings note that while in the body, we are prey to many trivial vexations. The body has to be maintained, but it can also fall ill or suffer injury. The life of the body is, in fact, a penance. In addition, the human mind is made in such a way that it can't focus on more than one thing at a time. Thus, if we care for the body it's usually at the expense of the soul.

But let's not become gloomy! After all, the ancient wisdom has given us a considerable amount of good advice for keeping the body healthy. We shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that the soul's physical shell is to be despised. Much of the advice on health we've considered is aimed at creating a state of wellbeing that frees us to concentrate on nourishing the spirit and soul. Also, if you are to live long enough to make good spiritual progress, you need to listen to and respect the body's needs.

What's more, the sight of a beautiful person can inspire you to set off on the spiritual path towards love's mysteries. So although your soul is buried away in a physical body, you shouldn't lose sight of the fact that by your very nature you straddle the strange and exciting line between animals and angels. On one side is your animal nature, using instinct and basic learning skills to satisfy your physical needs: on the other, your soul is yearning to enjoy divine bliss. The challenge is to balance these urges. The trouble with living on Earth is that the animal side can very easily overwhelm the spiritual side. It's so much easier – and it seems to make so much more sense – to believe in what you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell rather than in spiritual truths. But the

ancient wisdom is, as ever, understanding of our position.

According to the teachings, the fall of the soul has several natural consequences. One is that we lavish too much care on the body. That's natural, because the body is the soul's tangible companion. All the same, it's sad to watch someone neglect their soul in favour of their body. The wisdom compares such a person to a man who takes better care of his dogs and horses than he does of himself.

The soul, say the teachings, is left to perish from hunger while we try to satisfy the body, which is no more than an animal. But of course, no matter how much you eat or how beautifully you clothe and decorate yourself, you will never feel truly fulfilled. That will only happen if you nourish the soul. What has greater value – a desirable pair of shoes, or your soul?

A second problem is that we suffer from ignorance or carelessness of the true state of things. But that too is hardly surprising, because down here on Earth we're far from the brilliant illumination of spiritual insight: in fact we're in a region of mud and darkness, the murky sediment of the material world.

That being so, a third problem obscures the inner vision and distorts the truth: we fail in our trust of immortality and divine mercy. And no wonder, says the wisdom, since we live where the opposite qualities of death and cruelty abound. Some people find this so hard to bear that they swing the other way into an unrealistic attitude of over-optimism, refusing to acknowledge the darker aspects of life (the 'fluffy bunny' outlook). You probably recognize both these faults in either yourself or some of your friends and acquaintances. They're simply aspects of being human, but that doesn't mean you should shrug your shoulders and give up. No, once you've become aware of the problems, then you can start doing something to correct them. This book has been giving you advice on doing just that.

There is another problem, too. You run the risk of being seen as eccentric, being misunderstood and even ridiculed if you persist in rejecting popular values and concentrating on spiritual development. We are living in a society in which the media increasingly have an extraordinary power to dominate our lives and manipulate our ideas. None of us are immune to their influence. One way the media are used is to sell us things;

another is to provide constant entertainment that reduces us to passivity; a third is to create false emotions such as country-wide fear or jubilation. In almost no case is this done for our good. Far from it; the forces that so deeply affect what we think, do and feel are political and economic. The powers that be cannot profit by us learning to think independently and critically, and therefore we're discouraged from doing so.

Where is the spiritual in all this? Of course you have to deal with physical reality. But you also need to remember that your true life – your important life – is that of the soul. All of the advice and magic in this book has pointed in this one direction: the honouring of spiritual truth as well as physical reality. However, once you start putting the ancient teachings into practice, you'll be going against the flow of society. Even some of your friends and relatives might find it hard to understand and accept your values. So you need to be strong, and that strength comes from confidence in your beliefs – and confidence will arise as the ancient wisdom proves its value in your life. Remember, too, to be tolerant of people who might criticize or be baffled by the way you live. They're following their own path, and you're following yours. Explain yourself by all means, but be gentle and learn to walk away if the situation becomes uncomfortable. After all, not everyone is ready for a spiritual way of life.

You've already received the ancient advice that you should live as if on a journey. The wisdom takes this teaching a step further, and characterizes that journey as a pilgrimage. Once you realize that the goal of your life is a spiritual destination – heaven or union with the Divine Power itself – then everything, say the teachings, begins to fall into place. You will no longer value so much the life of the senses, because you'll realize that the Earth – the most physical of places in the cosmos – is not your natural home. That's why you can never find lasting contentment or peace in the endless variety of pleasures that are on offer here. Not even true love shared with a life-partner will really satisfy the deepest yearning of your soul.

Only when you remember that you belong in the realm of the Divine Power will you begin to make sense of life and find a deep, meaningful and satisfying sense of purpose that will suffuse everything you do.

Re-creating the world

Since the material world is not our true home, how are we to live in it? We've already received considerable advice from the ancient wisdom on that subject, but without looking deeply into the underlying philosophy. Now it's time to ground your knowledge. Let's start from the teachings' observation that nothing has much reality to it, because all things – from material objects to thoughts – are impermanent. That has implications, one of which is that you try to hide from this uncomfortable truth by projecting your own sense of reality onto the world.

That's easy enough to see through examples. Take a joke that makes you laugh, while leaving somebody else unmoved. The joke doesn't have actual, objective humour: that entirely depends on the person hearing it. We approach the whole of our lives subjectively: it's all we can do. How to see the world from another point of view than your own? It seems impossible: you naturally accept what you experience as real.

However, you can make significant changes in your world simply by altering your attitude towards it. If life seems harsh, then try to look at it from a different viewpoint. The ancient wisdom says clearly that it's up to you to enjoy what life gives you. The internal life doesn't depend on external reality – it's the other way around. You've had some experience of this truth already through practising your mind-training.

The teachings assure us that everything comes from the Divine Power and is destined to return there. Thus your life work is to tune yourself into goodness and truth so that you can see that they are still present even when life is tough. This is how you harmonize with the cosmic rhythms of existence. We've looked in some detail at the seven planetary steps for achieving this. The aim of all the magic and meditation is to bring your mind and body into such a state of harmony that you no longer feel like a helpless victim buffeted by fate. On the contrary, you find your natural place in the universe and begin to see purpose and pattern in your life.

When you're in a state of discord, says the wisdom, all things seem discordant to you. But find your inner core of peace, and you'll be able to deal with the pains and troubles of life on earth

with grace and strength. Half a millennium before Freud and Jung founded the discipline of psychology, the wisdom teachings anticipated their discoveries by advocating that we work on ourselves as carefully as an artist painting a picture or a poet writing a poem. Life is beyond your control, but that simply doesn't matter when you can alter your attitude towards it.

This is true human freedom, which we all too often choose to ignore. This is the work that will eventually, bit by bit, bring you to the state of complete fulfilment for which you've been searching through partners, friends, family, jobs, holidays, homes, fitness and entertainment. You don't have to give up anything at all unless you begin to feel it's wrong or harmful; all that's required is that you begin to learn about your real needs and desires. Stability and peace are nowhere to be found in the world – not for long, anyway – but they're fully there in your mind should you care to look for them.

Once you begin to understand yourself and live with some sense of harmony, you actually start to rise above fate. Rather than being pushed around by circumstances, you will know how to deal with life. The wisdom suggests that you change your focus. Instead of looking outwards and seeing the events that happen to you, turn around and look within. Then you can decide how to act. The teachings phrase this in the language of astrology, for that is the language that can best express the relationship between ourselves and the cosmos.

The ancient wisdom sees each human being as a miniature version of the cosmos, containing exactly the same forces. Remember, when your soul fell from heaven to earth, it took on the qualities of each planetary sphere through which it passed. So, rather than studying the heavens without, you should turn to the heavens within. Remember too that as well as planetary qualities, you contain a scrap of the Divine Power: the spark that animates you and links you with your true home. Once you've learned to pay more attention to your inner processes – the workings of the soul – then you can truly start to find your place in the cosmos, your purpose and aim.

It's important to remember that nowhere do the wisdom teachings promise that once you've begun to align yourself with the cosmos, you won't suffer any more hardships or problems.

You've already learned enough to know that life on Earth simply isn't like that, and that no such promise could be fulfilled. What the teachings do promise is totally realistic and absolutely verifiable: that you can take charge of your inner universe of feelings so that the outer universe loses its power to hurt you. That's a huge achievement, and not one that will come quickly or easily, but bit by bit, if you practise, you will find life changing for the better. The ancient wisdom tells us that to live in this way is to turn away from the mundane troubles of life and to put ourselves under heavenly protection. That is your aim: to be blessed by the divine forces of the cosmos.

Living in the now

We've already considered at length the impermanent, illusory nature of every aspect of life on earth, from physical objects to thoughts and ideas. You already know that true fulfilment is to be found by working on your inner self, on your feelings and reactions – the heavens within. But what do you actually spend most of your time doing? You think about the past and the future. That may sound startling, but it's true.

If you begin to tune in and become aware of what's passing through your mind throughout the course of the day, you will become increasingly aware of how little time you really spend in the present. Much of your thought – of everyone's thought – is taken up with running over past events: regretting or revelling in them, rewriting to better effect what you said, unwillingly reliving uncomfortable situations. Once you turn away from that, the tendency is to start worrying, planning and fretting about the future. Your full attention is very, very rarely focused on the present moment.

Yet the present – that tiny, ever-changing, elusive millisecond – is all you can directly experience of your life. Everything else takes place in your memory or imagination, and has no more reality than the rest of your thoughts. In a very real sense, we all live very, very little of our lives consciously. That's an alarming idea.

Of course, we are creatures living in time, and there can be value in looking behind us or ahead. You can learn from past mistakes, reevaluate events, see them in a new light; the future

requires some planning, even on the simple level of deciding what ingredients to buy to make dinner. But these activities don't account for the enormous amount of time we all spend – or rather waste – in thoughts that take us away from present awareness. For only in the present can you make changes for the better: the past is gone, and the future not yet arrived – the now is all you have.

The wisdom teachings have already advised you to practise meditation as a way of learning to calm and control your thought processes. In meditation, you try to become conscious of what your mind is doing. When it wanders – as it inevitably does – you bring it back to the subject on which you're focusing. You do that as many times as necessary in the course of a session. Bit by bit and slowly, the mind steadies down. Meanwhile, you find yourself learning, perhaps with some surprise, a great deal more about what goes on in your mind. It's like listening to yourself for the first time.

That is a good start, but you can also find other ways to live in the present. Meditation, after all, comprises only a small part of your day. The rest of the time, you need to learn always to use the present moment in the best way possible, whatever you may be doing. Thus you take the teachings' advice into the moral realm and start applying to your daily activities the awareness you use in meditation.

Remember that according to the ancient wisdom we live as if in a dream, drifting through life believing that what's unreal is real. The only way of waking up is to live in the present moment. The more you learn to do so, the easier it becomes to discriminate between activities that are good for you and those that do not in any way nourish your soul. Of course, in everyone's life there will be necessary activities that seem unprofitable. That's the nature of life in this imperfect world – but that just makes it all the more important to spend as much time as you can on wholesome, enjoyable activities and to practise keeping a positive outlook even when you're doing things that feel barren or unpleasant.

Learning to live in the present is an art, and as such it takes practice. The best way to go about it is gently, without expecting too much of yourself. After all, you're trying to break habits of a lifetime, and that's not going to happen overnight. If you try too

hard and for too long at a time to stay in the present, you'll find yourself feeling strained and tired, and when you fail you'll feel defeated. Be kind to yourself, and start modestly. First of all practise during daily meditation sessions, then take your attempts into daily life at home or at work. A good place to start is during repetitive chores during which your mind tends to wander. It can be quite surprising to find how pleasurable such a mundane task as washing up can be once you're fully present in what you're doing!

This is a truly transformative exercise that brings you vividly into the centre of your own life. By making a little space in your daily existence to practise what the ancient wisdom teaches, you've begun well – and you can also try to recall, whatever you are doing, that your life comes from a blissful divine source to which all your longing is leading you again.

True delight

If all this begins to seem rather like hard work, then it's time to recall that you're learning to open yourself to true happiness. But let's start at the opposite extreme. Why bother to do any of this – read or write, learn or teach – or indeed, do anything at all? Many of us have asked the same questions in moments of depression or lethargy, when the purpose of life eludes us and everything we do seems pointless. The answer that the wisdom teachings give is brisk and rather surprising: the only worthwhile reason for doing anything is that it gives pleasure.

We need to look a little deeper into this idea. We have just discussed the point that life exists only in the present moment. Therefore, everything you do should give you satisfaction both now and for ever. You should be able to look back on whatever you are doing right now with happiness and confidence that it's good for your soul. You should not worry about what others think of your actions. For one thing, people's reaction is not something you can always predict: you can only guess at it. For another, acting for approval denotes a superficiality and craving to be liked that is no way to gain happiness.

You have to follow your own conscience, not do what you imagine will impress others. You may be seen as eccentric, since you're not conforming to expectations, but worrying about other

people's opinions isn't going to bring you inner peace. According to the ancient wisdom, the happiest people are those who rely on their inner life rather than on other people and the changeable events and circumstances of the world.

That means waking up from this dream of life and living to the full in the present, without expectations that may or may not be fulfilled. Whatever you're doing should be a source of delight, whether it's performing a job of work or simply making a cup of tea. Right now is the only point of time – tiny, yet infinite – in which you can be happy. If you really believe that in the depths of your being, you'll always do your best. The job will be well done, the tea perfectly brewed. But if your thoughts are on the outcome, you're not living in the present at all. That lays you open to disappointment when the job is criticized or the tea turns out to be weak.

Whatever you do should be an end in itself. That way, you reclaim all the satisfaction and pleasure for yourself in the present moment. But if you're not acting to impress others, if you're not depending on the unpredictable future for happiness, where then do you find your criterion for bliss? Where else but in the realm of the divine itself. The wisdom teaches that only the Divine Power is unchanging, eternal and infinite; hence, the Divine Power is the sole source of reliable happiness. If you're to be happy, you need to find that divine spark within and act according to its dictates. Then you'll be in harmony with the cosmos and basing your happiness on an unshakeable foundation.

All the advice about meditation and learning to align yourself with the universe is aimed at achieving this state of happiness that will bring you freedom from the fears and anxieties that conforming to convention can create. But the wisdom teaching's view of happiness is not a selfish one: on the contrary, the genuinely happy person has reached that state by abandoning his or her own will to the divine will. Only then can anyone really be said to be in a state of harmony, able not only to rejoice fully in the present but also to make others happy.

That doesn't mean becoming a monk or nun, or living outside society in any way. Life can continue just as usual, yet miraculously transformed from within. This is the state described in the Chinese spiritual classic *Ten Bulls*, in which the enlightened

sage describes the simplicity of his life. Just like everyone else, he visits the wine shop and the market, but everyone he encounters is blessed by contact with his inner peace. You may not aspire to such an exalted goal as enlightenment, but every step you take along the way of the wisdom teachings will not only improve your own life, but bring pleasure and inspiration to others as well.

Gathering focus

An important doctrine of the ancient wisdom is the principle of unity. After all, everything in the universe derives from one single source, and the soul's journey to happiness takes it back to that source. Hence it follows that you should focus and concentrate your energies, rather than scattering them on a variety of tasks and concerns. We've looked at this subject before, but it bears repeating at this point.

Remember the analogy of the farmer neglecting his own land to work on another's? Such a person would be foolish, to say the least. Yet most people neglect to work on their own souls, preferring to scatter their energy accumulating belongings and seeking entertainment. But you know better. Why waste time chasing illusions, allowing yourself to be distracted from what's truly important? You have learned by now that the secret of happiness lies within, just waiting to be discovered.

If you want to make good progress towards contentment, it's necessary to concentrate your powers on that aim. Learning to be happy is no different from learning any other subject: you need to set aside time for your lessons, learn them thoroughly and practise what you learn. And you also have to combat the temptation to fritter your energy on pursuits that will give you only temporary pleasure.

That's not to say that you should give up meeting your friends, shopping or visiting the cinema. Not at all: what's vital here is not the activity itself but your attitude towards it. As long as you are clear that your true search for happiness lies elsewhere, it's fine to live as you have always done. Remember the Chinese sage! But if you look for lasting satisfaction in such pleasures, you'll be sucked in to a kind of addictive cycle. You already know from experience that you'll need more and more of this kind of

distraction in order to keep your levels of cheer topped up. The ancient wisdom warns that someone who scatters their energies in this way wastes them in the process.

We're taught to feel proud of our ability to multi-task, but according to the wisdom teachings, only an immature and weak mind tries to focus on more than one thing at a time. Remember, the present moment is the only one in which you're truly alive. Confuse this moment with a split consciousness, and you miss it. Human beings are simply not designed to be active in this way, nor can you focus on more than one thing at a time. Just try talking to a friend at the same time as listening to a piece of music. You can only listen properly to one or the other – which means the other is offering enjoyment that goes to waste.

It's up to each of us to decide how much true satisfaction there is in our lives, and whence it derives. If you can step away from habits such as turning on the television or computer to accompany your other activities, then you will begin to hear the needs of your own heart and mind speaking with increased clarity. Remember, the teachings recommend that you pursue what you've loved doing since childhood. As life fills up with obligations and you establish habits and routines, it's all too easy to lose sight of your talents and true pleasures. But it is possible to recover them, and then you'll want to spend more time focused on just one satisfying activity at a time, exactly as the wisdom suggests. You'll begin to realize what peace and contentment are. It's just a matter of simplifying your life, of searching within for answers, of reconnecting with that divine spark that's your true self. Although that's a lifetime's pursuit, it's a profoundly rewarding one.

Three paths for the happy soul

What differentiates human beings from the animals? According to the wisdom teachings, mankind would be pretty low on the scale of being were it not for just one factor. Physically and mentally, we're worse off than our animal relatives, for animals don't have such complex needs, and none of them regret the past or worry about the future. It's only the inner spark of divinity that brings us happiness. If we ignore it, our lives are little more than endless attempts to fulfil our basic animal needs for physical comfort.

We've considered at length how futile is the search for lasting happiness in a world where nothing endures for very long. Happiness comes from the Divine Power, because only there is eternity found. And we are blessed with an immortal part: the divine spark, the soul. So, once you've learned to nourish the soul as well as take sufficient care of the body, you are on the road to true happiness. The teachings advise you to find time to turn away from external activities, and focus on the secret and wonderful activity of the soul. If you do this, you free yourself from expectations and can be truly happy in the present moment.

That is one path to happiness. Traditionally, there are three paths: those of action, wisdom and devotion. We looked briefly at this subject in Chapter Four. Each of the paths is linked to an aspect of the Divine Power, and each is suitable for certain types of person. You've already learnt about the path of action, which has been described as meditation and ritual. That's maybe a surprising idea of action, but we're talking about 'soul action'. And as well as describing this path, the ancient wisdom also gives advice on finding happiness through truth (the path of wisdom) and love (that of devotion). Each of us will be drawn to one or another path in particular – though as the goal of all three is the same, they overlap to some extent.

The path of wisdom can be explained very simply. As the teachings point out, you're considered lucky if you are blessed with talents, beauty, riches or honour. But what if you misuse such gifts? It's all too easy to abuse power, to use beauty for manipulation, or to be profligate with money. There is no good fortune in the gifts themselves, but only in the way they are used, and that depends on making wise choices. Only wisdom, according to the teachings, prevents you from making painful mistakes, and directs your actions to good ends.

A wise person can even turn difficulties to their advantage, or at the very least adopt a sensible attitude towards them. So, there's no inherent goodness in the advantages you may possess, except wisdom. And wisdom is to be found in philosophy and religion, which in the ancient teachings are one and the same thing. As you know, philosophy means 'love of wisdom' and is intended to give guidance on life, just as religious teachings do. Both are concerned with the spiritual life and the health and

happiness of the soul.

But there's another aspect to the path of wisdom, and it's about knowing your own limits. Even great philosophers such as Plato didn't trust their own abilities and used to call upon the Divine for help every day. If even such an exalted figure as Plato thought he needed assistance, shouldn't you also think about asking for help? Until the rise of secularism in the West, praying for support in times of need would have come as second nature to most people, as it still is in most cultures around the world. Prayer has a powerful effect, which you can easily test for yourself.

If you're not accustomed to praying it may feel embarrassing, but you can begin simply by just sitting in a consecrated place such as a church, where the atmosphere is conducive to quiet concentration on spiritual matters. Soon you'll lose your self-consciousness and then words will begin to flow. You'll almost certainly feel a sense of relief and lightness of heart that's very close to a physical sensation of a weight being lifted from the shoulders, and along with this can arrive a new confidence and an increased ability to cope with difficulties. Prayer is a way of acknowledging your own limits and weaknesses, and opening yourself to a source of infinitely greater strength. These are the reasons why prayer is an essential part of all religions: it has real benefits.

Once you've begun to recognize what divine truth might be, and to access its wisdom, that opens up a road to happiness. That truth isn't discovered by rational enquiry, but by intuitive experience. As with so many aspects of the wisdom teachings, this takes time and patience, but the increase in serenity and confidence that develops will amply repay your efforts.

If the way of truth doesn't strike a chord with you, then probably the way of devotion will be more to your taste. Indeed, this way is perhaps the easiest of the three for the majority of people. The ancient wisdom observes that it's far easier to learn to love the Divine Power than to participate in divine wisdom. Love comes naturally to most people: it's just a matter of reflecting on Diotima's ladder of love and progressively raising your sights.

The teachings recommend a whole-hearted approach: the more ardently you love, the happier you will become as you draw

nearer to the very essence of happiness itself. Of course, as we've seen in our consideration of love, the head needs to be in tune with the heart. Love needs wisdom to balance and guide it. And it's necessary to keep in mind that only the Divine Power will never change and never disappoint – so only love of the divine has the power of giving true contentment. Lest you get disheartened, thinking that this is beyond your reach, the ancient wisdom offers an encouraging teaching.

According to the wisdom, the truly happy person has all his or her desires fulfilled – but if you can learn to desire what you already have, then you will be happy and contented. This is another way of living in the now, and it means learning to understand that since the universe was created by the source of goodness and love, nothing in it can be evil. The teachings take this as true, difficult though it is for us to accept. According to them, the pain in your life is essentially good: it's there for a purpose – either to push you back onto the right path, or to make you strong and patient.

You're likely to struggle a bit with this doctrine, but it might help to think in terms of the law of karma: if something bad happens, it might be because you've done something to disturb the universal harmony. If you can't find any reason for it, then it's probably just down to the fact that you're living in the material world, where nothing is perfect. If you can see suffering as a lesson, it's much easier to bear than if you simply feel victimized.

Whatever path you decide to take, the main principle to keep in mind is that of harmony. Happiness lies in finding your rightful place and purpose in the cosmos, so that you can add your own unique note to the universal music. If you pursue that aim, eventually you will become a true philosopher – a lover of wisdom whose happiness is right here, right now, because you are safe and secure in the knowledge of your own divine origin and home.

The philosophy handed down by the ancient wisdom is inspirational and ecstatic. Like a guiding angel, it wakes us from the dream of life and raises us up to the heights of heaven, there to be united with the divine source of happiness. This is the supreme gift that the wisdom teachings offer us – not simply to feel happy, but to be happiness itself.



Progress Worksheet – Six Months

It's a good idea to monitor your journey towards happiness every six months or so. Set aside some time to look back and assess how far you've come, and to look ahead at where you're going. Try some of the following suggestions to focus your thoughts.

What areas of your life have you been aiming to improve most? List these and think about how much things have changed over six months.

Describe the advances with which you feel most pleased. This is where you give yourself a big pat on the back! You've proved that you can make life more satisfying, so all you need to do is continue.

What would you like to work on further? How might you go about it? Consider where you might next turn your energies. Maybe it's time to take on a more challenging area of life.

How have you experienced the magic you've been using? Reflect on any development of sensitivity you feel towards the cosmic energies you've been invoking. Note down any remarkable occurrences.

How would you like your life to be in another six months' time? Describe it clearly, so that you know exactly what you're aiming for.

Add any extra observations you feel might be important or that could prove useful.

Progress Worksheet – One Year

Look back to the time when you first read this book and tried the exercises. Can you remember how you felt then? How did you get on the first time you attempted the exercises? How different do you feel now: are you more confident, happier, more centred?

How has working with your daimon developed? Do you experience the energy only when you are performing a ritual, or have you become more aware of it in daily life? If the latter, what difference has that made for the better?

How have your relationships changed? Have you been aware of a friendship or family relationship becoming closer? Have you made new friends, and if so, what have they brought into your life? Has the way you feel towards others altered at all?

Form a study group with friends. Although this is not essential to the path, gathering together a couple of like-minded friends with whom you could discuss the ancient wisdom or perform rituals

can be very helpful as well as enjoyable.

Celebrate your spiritual birthday. Choose a day for an annual rebirth ritual. This can take whatever form you choose: perhaps a private ceremony, or a small party with friends. Be proud of your progress along the path to happiness!

Initiation Worksheet, Stage Seven

What are the most important teachings of the ancient wisdom? Go back over this chapter if need be. What most impressed you? How has your understanding of life changed?

What new possibilities are now open to you? List ways in which you intend to improve your life and be happier.

Which of the Three Paths most appeals to you? Think of how you can begin to follow it.

Look within and assess how happy you are. Make a promise to yourself that you'll practise the techniques you've learned for six months and then reassess your level of happiness.

Further Resources



Courses

Should you wish to learn more about astrology, there are reputable academic institutions that you could apply to join. Some offer local classes as well as correspondence courses for international students. For would-be students based in the UK, I can suggest the following:

Faculty of Astrological Studies www.astrology.org.uk

The London School of Astrology
www.londonschoolofastrology.co.uk

The Mayo School of Astrology www.mayoastrology.com

A web search will locate many schools in other countries, including:

USA – Amerian Federation of Astrologers www.astrologers.com

Canada – Canadian Association for Astrological Education
www.thecaae.com

Australia – Federation of Australian Astrologers
www.faa-inc.org.au

New Zealand – Astrology Foundation Inc.
www.astrologyfoundation.org.nz



Suggested Reading

Ficino, Marsilio, trans. Charles Boer. *Marsilio Ficino's Book of Life*. (Texas: Spring Pubs., 1992).

Plato, trans. Christopher Gill. *The Symposium*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003).

Scott, Walter, ed. *Hermetica: the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus*. (Bath: Solos Press, 1997).

Shepherd, Michael, ed. *Friend to Mankind: Marsilio Ficino 1433–1499*. (London: Shephard Walwyn, 1999).